

# Mina Loy and the Myth of the Modern Woman

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is all my own work.

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## Abstract

This study examines Mina Loy's unpublished autobiographical writings and challenges the existing critical myth of Loy as the 'modern woman'. Between 1920 and the late 1940s Loy wrote four overlapping versions of her autobiography: 'The Child and the Parent', 'Goy Israels', 'Islands in the Air' and 'Insel'. This study develops a chronology for Loy's autobiographies and it examines each version's engagement with constructs of the 'modern' and of the 'modern writer'. Since the 1980s scholars have primarily focused on the 'modernist' techniques Loy employed in her early poetry. Often these critical surveys exclude texts that cannot be grouped under the heading 'modernism' in order to justify Loy's inclusion within the movement. Her poetry and her autobiographies written after the late 1920s suggest a shift in her aesthetics away from her earlier 'modernist' work. Till now her prose and her poetry written after 1925, about two-thirds of her total output, have been excluded from critical evaluations of her writing. Through readings of Loy's unpublished autobiographical manuscripts alongside her later, neglected poems this analysis argues for a broader and less exclusive understanding of Loy's entire oeuvre. In particular, it will address Loy's belief in modernism's 'prophetic' potential and how this relates to her autobiographical writings on consciousness and on loss. The study begins with a discussion of 'modernism', 'modernity' and the 'modern', and charts how these terms are defined in Loy's own essays on literature and art. It also examines Loy's depictions of Victorian femininity in the context of constructions, then and more recently, of the *fin-de-siècle* 'New Woman' and of the twentieth-century 'modern woman'. My analysis considers how Loy arrived at her current status, via editors, critics and her fellow poets. Ultimately I argue that Loy's autobiographies portray the inability of 'modernity' to exclude the past.

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I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the excellent staff at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, in particular, Patricia C. Willis, Curator of the Yale Collection of American Literature. I am also indebted to the staff at the University of Maryland Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Houghton Library (Harvard), the McPherson Library (University of Victoria), and the University of London Library for their research assistance. I am also grateful to Claire Burrows and the archive staff at ArjoWiggins for their correspondence.

I was fortunate to receive a travel bursary from the UCL Graduate School to revisit the Beinecke Library's Mina Loy archive in 2006.

Finally, I'd like to thank James Byrne, Anne Enderwitz, and Christopher Madden for carefully reading and commenting on this study at various stages and my family for their generous support.

## Introduction

In his introduction to the most recent edition of Mina Loy's poetry, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996), Roger Conover describes her as the forgotten former 'Belle of the American Poetry Ball', after which he recounts a typically 'bohemian' evening in 1917 at Greenwich Village's Webster Hall where she, Marcel Duchamp and other members of New York's avant-garde practised 'outlandish behaviour' in full (mandatory) masquerade.<sup>1</sup> Conover admits that such recollections of Loy as 'part of a group' or as 'a guest at a ball', have in effect granted the poet 'a forceful personality, a cerebral bearing, a perfect complexion, and a sexual body. But not a voice'.<sup>2</sup> Yet, some Loy scholars cannot resist lending credibility and glamour to Loy's literary reputation by listing her artistic allies and by recounting familiar myths of the early twentieth-century avant-garde. It would be premature to ignore this kind of mythmaking and its possible influence on Loy criticism. Despite increasing interest in Loy both within and outside of academia, assumptions made about her life and her character overshadow critical interpretations of her writing. Surely, mythmaking serves a dual purpose, especially in cases of 'marginalised' authors: it provides a historical context for the discussion of the author's artistic contribution and heightens the reader's sense of his or her uniqueness.

Since the 1980s, scholars have used the years between 1914 and 1930 as their point of entry in assessing Loy's literary contribution. During this period Loy published the writing for which she is best known today, roughly thirty poems and two poem series: 'Love Songs' (1915-1917) and 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose' (1923-1925). Between the 1920s and the 1950s, Loy published fewer poems and began to write

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<sup>1</sup> Roger L. Conover, 'Introduction', *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (New York: Noonday Press, 1996), pp. xi-xx (pp. xi). (Hereafter cited as *LLB96*).

<sup>2</sup> Conover, 'Introduction', *LLB96*, pp. xi-xii.

voluminous versions of her autobiography in prose.<sup>3</sup> These manuscripts exist in multiple draft versions and are contained in six of the eight boxes at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Many of her prose manuscripts appear to be missing whole sequences of pages.

The Beinecke holds almost all seven of Loy's known autobiographical manuscripts: 'Brontolivido'; 'Goy Israels'; 'Esau Penfold'; 'The Child and the Parent'; 'Islands in the Air' and the manuscript of *Insel*, which was published in 1991, almost thirty years after Loy's death.<sup>4</sup> 'Colossus', a narrative based on her relationship with the poet Arthur Cravan remains in private collection, but some excerpts have been published.<sup>5</sup> The location of most of her manuscripts in one archive simplifies the process of accessing her unpublished material. However, it is likely that many of Loy's readers are unaware of the manuscripts' existence because these prose narratives have been excluded almost entirely from editions of Loy's work. The following study will examine some of the short fragments that were excerpted for these editions. If critics have discussed her autobiographies at all, it is within analyses of her poetry, and often her autobiographies provide no more than 'factual' evidence or psychological motives for critical readings. However, a critical argument about the autobiographies has emerged within Loy scholarship in the last ten years.<sup>6</sup> As the following study will show, there have been a few recent attempts to analyse certain aspects of her autobiographies with respect to Loy's poems. No comprehensive, book-length study of all of Loy's autobiographies exists.

Of her unpublished manuscripts, three appear to have been carried through to a near-finished state: 'The Child and the Parent', 'Islands in the Air', and 'Goy Israels'

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<sup>3</sup> See the Appendix for a possible chronology of Loy's autobiographical manuscripts.

<sup>4</sup> This study will not examine 'Brontolivido' or 'Esau Penfold'. Unlike Loy's other autobiographies, these two manuscripts do not feature Loy's autobiographical 'self' as a central character. A comparison of 'Brontolivido' with Loy's Futurist inspired poems has yet to be made.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter Five examines published selections of the 'Colossus' manuscript.

<sup>6</sup> Scholarly articles that compare Loy's poems to her autobiographical manuscripts usually base their readings on 'Goy Israels'. Chapter 4 details some of these studies.



(hereafter referred to as 'Child', 'Islands' and 'Goy'). Although Loy did not date her manuscripts, 'Goy' and 'Child' were most likely written during the 1920s and 1930s while she was living in Paris. 'Islands' borrows chapters from 'Child' and is a revised version partly written in Paris and, after 1936, in New York. Both novels take Loy's upbringing in London and her early days at art school as their focus, but they are not limited to a retelling of memories. Much of 'Goy' and 'Islands' fluctuates between recounting specific events, such as receiving a scolding or seeing herself in a mirror, and more analytical meditations on the nature of being and on the process of visual perception. Her subject is the effect of various different impressions on the child's intellect; both everyday sensations and family relations are intensified and expanded to fill an evolving psychological picture.

Recently, in December of 2005, the first chapter of 'Islands', entitled 'Hurry', was featured in an issue of Columbia University's *Italian Poetry Review*. There are currently no plans to publish the manuscript in its entirety. However, the appearance of this chapter raises the hope that Loy's manuscripts might one day be published. The archive presents several challenges for Loy scholars. On the surface, it is an idiosyncratic collection of typescripts, handwritten drafts, address books, letterhead and graph paper that illustrates the fantasy of a modern writer at work. The archive's carefully ordered folders are at odds with the work they contain. Drafts that appear to be missing pages have been reassembled, and pages that have no designated place are ordered by theme. A much earlier impression lies beside a later meditation. The archive's collections of notes and drafts make it possible for readers to guess at how Loy's ideas might have developed, and to see how much they reappear unchanged.

It is certainly not by chance that the Beinecke Library is the sole public owner of Loy's papers. Although the library was established in 1701, the Yale Collection of American Literature (YCAL) was founded in 1911 and began primarily from first

edition copies donated by alumni. Over the rest of the century, the collection 'continued to develop along the lines of [the original donor's] interests'. 'Bibliographical completeness received greater attention than rarity or association, though rare books and association copies abound.'<sup>7</sup> By 1934, curator Donald C. Gallup and faculty advisor Norman Holmes Pearson began to emphasize the importance of collecting work from twentieth-century authors.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, one of the Beinecke's major donors and advisors, Carl Van Vechten, was not only an influential editor and exponent of the early twentieth-century 'isms', he was also Loy's first literary advisor and friend.<sup>9</sup> Besides Loy's papers, the Beinecke holds manuscripts and other written material from Gertrude and Leo Stein, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, Henry Miller, Mabel Dodge Luhan, William Carlos Williams, Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), and many other major and minor writers often aligned with modernism. Yet, what is interesting about the Beinecke's claim to bibliographical completeness is how they thereby extend the definition of the archive:

Today it is the author's personal papers that are of far more interest than the fair copy of a poem or an appealing group of letters. The papers that bear witness to the creative process—an author's notes, drafts, setting copies, corrected proofs, and the documentation, such as correspondence, which surrounds them—are chiefly to be desired...<sup>10</sup>

The language used to describe the library's holdings suggests that their collection of rarities is not merely a storehouse of documents, but a miraculous freezing of time:

No stretch of the imagination is required to appreciate the constellation of Modernist relationships when the papers of Ezra Pound, H.D., Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, Matthew Josephson, Mina Loy, Carl Van Vechten, and Glenway Wescott are to be found in one library...The vast correspondence

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia C. Willis, 'The Collection of American Literature', in *The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library: A Guide to the Collections* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Library, 1994), pp. 35-49 (p. 35).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 185-189.

<sup>10</sup> Willis, p. 36. It is interesting that Willis does not consider a 'group of letters' part of an author's 'personal papers'. It seems that 'personal papers' designates those items which are involved in the writing and publishing processes.

present in the archives of the period documents virtually every event of consequence to its authors, from the experiences of Pound, Stein and H.D. in Britain and Europe during two world wars to the explosive concerts in New York and Paris of George Antheil's *Ballet Mécanique*, scored for piano, percussion and airplane engines.<sup>11</sup>

By these definitions, an individual author's archive is seen as a complete body of work that offers an additional insight into both the author's creative process and his or her historical significance. It is essentially a representation of the writer's private 'self' as well as their public importance within literary communities of their era. Loy's papers are of greater significance alongside those of her contemporaries and vice versa; they literally correspond and in doing so recreate the past. What are these 'personal papers' and how are they different from the published texts? In what way is the archive treated like a repository of private memory rather than publicly available writing—not artificial or generated for an audience, but quotidian and hence more 'real'? What then is the allure of the archive? It appears that by the Beinecke's definition, 'personal papers' are those which were intended for the author's eyes only—drafts, corrections, notes—anything except what became publicly available.

Among Loy's archived papers is this short verse:

Twice everything has  
already taken place  
that our personality or destiny  
is like a roll of negative film—  
already printed but unrevealable  
until it has found a camera  
to project it—and a  
surface to throw it upon.<sup>12</sup>

The poem is not intended as an epigraph; it does not reappear in subsequent, more finalized versions of her autobiographies. It is hand-written, upside down on a sheet of letterhead from Loy's lampshade shop in Paris, which she operated between 1926 and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>12</sup> Mina Loy, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature, Mina Loy Papers, MSS 6, box 1, folder 10, undated page, recto and verso. (Hereafter cited as YCAL). I have reproduced the text and style of Loy's letterhead below.

1928.<sup>13</sup> On the verso of this page is the chapter outline for 'Child'. The page itself is polarized; depending on how it is rotated and read, each end provides its own contradictory 'heading'. If the page is read upside down, the brief enigmatic stanza dominates. If viewed conventionally, with the letterhead at the top, the official reproduced script reads:

MINA LOY

Paris, le\_\_\_\_\_192

52, Rue du Colisée

PARIS

Telephone ELYSEES 19-95

RUE N° 52

This end suggests facticity and at first cannot appear to be anything other than the correct way to hold the page. The presence of name, address and telephone number attests to the identity of its author as a definite entity. Such pre-signed pages act as documents in and of themselves; for this reason letterhead is preferred as a method of verification in matters of legal liability. Often it does not bear an individual's name as testimony to the text's contractual sincerity, but instead cites a presiding institutional or commercial name, which in effect supersedes the proper name. This decentring of authority from the individual to a more recognisable conglomerate strengthens the document's claim of authenticity. Letterhead fashioned by Ezra Pound in the early 1920s, while he was the London correspondent for *The Dial*, is one example of this type of collective endorsement. Each of these sheets has a printed list of thirty-three contributors' names in the left margin of the page, including Loy's, Joyce's, and Pound's own.<sup>14</sup> Aaron Jaffe suggests that Pound's *Dial* letterhead, and personal stationery that he used during the 1930s (containing a Henri Gaudier-Brzeska designed

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<sup>13</sup> Burke, pp. 340-341 and pp. 365-366.

<sup>14</sup> Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 91-93. Jaffe includes a facsimile of Pound's *Dial* letterhead (see Jaffe, p. 91, figure 3a).

logotype of his own head) are types of 'brand' names.<sup>15</sup> Pound's letterhead pages indicate that a collaboration of artists, and not him alone, increases the commercial and literary value of the sender's message.

In the case of Loy's letterhead, the name of her shop—which is simply 'MINA LOY'—functions as her signature and as a label for her designs simultaneously.<sup>16</sup> The public value placed on brand recognition as an indication of consumer status (either economic, social, or ideological) in a sense mimics the iconic, unifying function of artists' individual reputations within their respective circles of influence. The heading 'MINA LOY', as it appears in her letterhead, adds artistic and commercial value to her lamp designs; it alludes to her existing artistic reputation. And in the same way as a label rarely evokes the actual image of the designer, Mina Loy's private 'self' is not represented by 'MINA LOY', but rather it is associated with her 'public' and historical literary figure. Our reading of this page from Loy's archive is constituted by this tension—we are tempted to read the top of the page as official, and the bottom as revealing of something contra and perhaps subversive of the unambiguous, 'factual' 'MINA LOY' of the pre-printed page.

This letterhead page with the handwritten poem simultaneously represents two contrary (though related at their inception) co-existing versions of the 'writing-self' of Mina Loy. It is not only of great significance that the two find themselves coincidentally (or not so) on the same page; it is essential to their separate existences. One requires the other as both foil and source; together they set each other apart. Therefore, we cannot read Loy's autobiography without the awareness that autobiography is written against (or with the knowledge of) a public identity and referentiality to a living person.

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<sup>15</sup> Jaffe, pp. 91-93. Pound's personal stationery reads 'E. Pound Rapallo' and contains the Gaudier-Brzeska drawing of Pound's head, (see Jaffe, p. 92, figure 3b).

<sup>16</sup> Advertisement, 'Mina Loy', *Art et Industrie*, issue 7 (1927), p. v.

The poem itself offers some clue to this knowledge. 'Twice everything has/ already taken place' can be interpreted in multiple ways. If 'everything' has happened 'twice', then the first occurrence is the act or life event itself. The second happening can be read phenomenologically as the inner perception of the act, separate from an outer consciousness, which occurs again in its internalization. Or rather, the second occurrence to which Loy refers is a memory of the past, one that exists in the perpetual present and is therefore divided from its source by remembrance. If we consider autobiography as an act of charting a being-in-progress, is it also possible that Loy is referring to her experience of a 'personal' past re-experienced (and re-envisioned) through a 'public' existence? Is then the 'surface' that will bear the projected image of her life through her writing the mythic person bearing the name 'MINA LOY'?

The split and warring page found within Loy's archived material may serve to exemplify her difficult publishing history and her present status within the canon. Re-reading 'MINA LOY' without the suggestive poem attached is to read her in her current published form, and to accept the posthumous assembly of her writing: to read it biographically, through the eyes of her editors. Arguably, the process of editing as the shaping of a corpus of work is the textual equivalent and counterpart to the 'making' of a literary figure. Implicit in this assertion is the claim that when authors compile their own work they do so autobiographically—with the desire to dictate how they are read, as the said author of the composition. Conversely, an author might intentionally construct his or her body of work in opposition to the unified concept of an author's life. In Loy's case, much of the investment of editors and scholars has been to read and edit her writing as a means of piecing a forgotten legacy back together. Often they hope in doing so to diagnose the cause of Loy's disappearance from literary history.

How we choose to read Loy's published writing depends on which edition we put our confidence in as providing an 'accurate' body of work. The posthumously

assembled *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (1982) and *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996) (hereafter referred to as *LLB82* and *LLB96*) have had the most impact in re-establishing her reputation as a significant modernist figure. *LLB82*, published by the Jargon Society and edited by Conover, is a far more comprehensive collection of Loy's work than the more recent volume. Of this earlier book, Conover writes 'At the time, publishing her work felt more like a cause than an editorial occasion. [It] circulated like a secret handshake, and has since become part of the Loy myth'.<sup>17</sup> The availability of *LLB82* is limited; it is no longer in print and turns up in few libraries. Hence, readers experience Loy's writing today mostly through *LLB96*—a collection also edited by Conover but published by larger presses in the US and the UK. This most recent edition is still available and for this reason it most often constructs Loy's contemporary reception. How then do these two collections of Loy's work shape her biographically, and how might they be read in contrast to the unpublished work of the author? More interestingly, how can the exclusion of Loy's autobiographical writings from publication be read as deliberate and necessary for the preservation of her existing legacy? Before exploring these posthumously published editions and their editor's selection process, it is necessary to examine how Loy appears to have organized her own work for publication.

During her lifetime, Loy was published in the 'little magazines' that spawned an eccentric and experimental generation of writers in New York, Paris and other literary centres. In addition, two very limited collections of her poetry appeared while she was alive: one, a short volume titled *Lunar Baedeker* [sic] (1923) consisting of about 30 poems, and the other a larger book (though again in limited circulation) *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables* (1958) (hereafter referred to as *LB* and *LBTT*). Over both these

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<sup>17</sup> Conover, 'Introduction', *LLB96*, p. xviii.

collections, Loy had editorial control. Her biographer, Carolyn Burke, writes about the publication of Loy's first collection:

The book's internal structure evoked the distance she had covered. Judging as much by what was omitted as by what was included in her guide to aestheticism, she preferred to forget some of these journeys. Of the sixty-two poems published in the past ten years [between 1914-1923] [...] she included only half. Marianne Moore's well-known caveat "Omissions are not accidents" comes to mind when one realizes that Mina omitted ten early poems and twenty-one "Love Songs." In writing the history of her imagination, she was also revising the past.<sup>18</sup>

Not only was *LB* a map of personal 'journeys' through Loy's artistic 'imagination', it was a self-constructed and self-erected image of herself as a poet that she revised consciously in favour of literariness. Among the poems Loy chose not to include were 'The Effectual Marriage', the first section of 'Three Moments in Paris' ('One O'Clock at Night'), and twenty-one of her original thirty-four 'Love Songs'.<sup>19</sup> Loy's 'Songs' were written in response to her affairs with the Italian Futurist leaders F.T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini. Her intentional omission of twenty-one sections seems coherent with Burke's estimation that she was 'revising the past' of autobiographical (in particular sexual) detail. This choice also seems odd on Loy's part, as she famously burst onto the literary scene with the poems she would ultimately omit. In particular, 'Love Songs' scandalized the New York avant-garde poetry communities of the early twentieth century, so much so that on arrival she was already a well-known figure. But of the poems she did include, it appears that Loy's own editorial interests were consistent with the claim that her autobiographical project was, in part, to give order to and historicize a 'public self'. In the first section of *LB*, the poems 'Apology of Genius', 'Joyce's Ulysses', 'Poe', 'Brancusi's Golden Bird' and "'The Starry Sky'" of Wyndham

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<sup>18</sup> Burke, p. 322.

<sup>19</sup> Loy published the first of her 'Love Songs' (I-IV) in *Others*, 1 (July 1915), 6-8. In 1917, *Others* devoted an entire issue (no. 3.1) to an expanded version called 'Songs to Joannes' (I-XXXIV). Hereafter I will refer to Loy's poem series generally as 'Songs', unless comparing one version to another.



Lewis' align her with the experimentalists of her age and further her claim to be a 'genius' among them.

On the whole, Burke's biography is thorough and multi-faceted; she relies heavily on the memories of Loy's surviving children and friends. Her biography mines Loy's autobiographies for details about her upbringing and education. While the practice of interpreting memoir to develop a psychological picture of an author is not unusual, it is in some ways potentially limiting, evidenced here by Burke's reading of what she terms 'lightly fictionalized':

After reading Mina's 'novel' in its different versions, one comes away with the impression that the author's animus against her parents provided the source of her rebellious energy [...] Like much autobiography, Mina's 'novel' was shaped by the need to compose a self for whom she could feel compassion.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, Burke believed that 'Child', and its revision 'Islands', were complicated by Loy's own artfully presented self-image. The above quotation proves as much—the 'self' is 'composed'. Loy's biographer was aware that these life writings were neither purely fictional nor purely factual. Yet, what is still worrying about Burke's attitude towards the three main autobiographical texts is that she denies them any serious artistic merit. Certainly, a biographer's interest and a critic's interest in Loy's autobiographies might develop differently in relation to these texts. However, Burke's reading is important for two reasons: it is one of the few sources that engages with the entire range of Loy's autobiographies in order to compare them. In addition, Burke's biography uses the autobiographies to support her claims for Loy's modernity.

Throughout *Becoming Modern*, Burke interweaves Loy's poetry, manifestos and autobiographical writing with her spiritual progression (or more commonly her regression) and strongly links it to Loy's apparent hatred for her mother, Julia Lowy. 'Ladies in an Aviary', a chapter from 'Child', forms a critique of Victorian womanhood

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<sup>20</sup> Burke, p. 375.

and the demand of a patriarchal system for the devaluation of woman's desire is read simply as Loy distancing herself from her mother's generation. According to Burke, the chapter describes Victorian women as 'birdlike creatures with rustling bustles and pouting bosoms'.<sup>21</sup> She then continues by likening it to 'a cross between a Kate Greenaway and Burne-Jones', both painters who supposedly typified Victorian hyper-sentimentality and were later considered to embody the artistic weaknesses of their age. Finally, Burke passes judgment on Loy's apparent lack of compassion:

But while scorn for Victorian women overlaps with sympathy for their predicament, in the end they are blamed for having swallowed "the sugar of fictitious values." "To understand all is to forgive all," Mina told Julien [Levy, her son-in-law] when he complained to her of his family. Yet where Julia was concerned the maxim did not apply.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, the chapter to which Burke refers does not specifically mention Loy's mother, or 'Child's' mother figure, 'Ada'. It is not one of the more 'personal' chapters; it does not focus on a first-person narration but instead remains historical, philosophical and omnipresent. Moreover, there is an expression of sympathy for the predicament of Victorian women and very little, if any, outright moral judgment.

So within the extremes of the bird-cage and the storm of dust, the nervous system of half a universe is consumed with desires that, being unformed, are seldom consummated; but it is only recently that we have come to realize how disproportionate the women's role in the sugar-drama has been, having always interpreted her unselfconscious acquiescence for a general and serene lubricity. We can only suppose that this martyr to Nature's enervating propensity for keeping secrets to herself and throwing dust in our eyes, is endowed with a complex organism for this long incubation of some intrinsic quality she needs for the future.<sup>23</sup>

The 'sugar-drama' to which Loy refers encapsulates the barter system of marriage and its price: women's chastity. Though the detachment with which she writes this chapter

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>23</sup> Loy, 'The Child and The Parent', YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 15, p. 44. (Hereafter cited as 'Child').

about her mother's generation could be interpreted as overly pitying, in no way is it spiteful.

In fact, what Burke and other scholars have failed to recognise is Loy's similarity to (and in fact debt to) other feminist women writers, most obviously the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft. In *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft's chapter, 'Observations on the State of Degradation to which Woman is Reduced by Various Causes', argues:

And why do [women] not discover, when 'in the noon of beauty's power', that they are treated like queens only to be deluded by hollow respect, till they are led to resign, or not assume, their natural prerogatives? Confined, then, in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch. It is true they are provided with food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin; but health, liberty, and virtue are given in exchange.<sup>24</sup>

It would be inconceivable to interpret Wollstonecraft's text as driven solely by an animosity towards one woman or women generally. It also would be reductive to imagine that Wollstonecraft intended her treatise to distance herself morally from members of her own sex. I would argue that both the placement of Loy's feminist arguments within her 'autobiographies' and their unpublished status have encouraged readers to interpret them as indicative of her own 'animus', and to imagine their purpose is mainly the formation of a self (as Burke argues) for whom she could feel compassion.

Loy's daughter, Joella Bayer, donated her mother's papers to the Beinecke Library in 1974 and 1975.<sup>25</sup> These consist of typescript and handwritten drafts of poetry and prose as well as lampshade designs, short stories, plays, drawings and notes on various subjects including metaphysics, art and artists within her circle. Curators at the archive later attempted to organise Loy's papers into different manuscripts. It is unknown how much of the original order at the time of donation was maintained. The

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ed. by Miriam Brody (London: Penguin Classics, 1975), pp. 61-62.

<sup>25</sup> YCAL Online Catalogue <<http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/beinecke.LOY.con.html>> [accessed 17 September 2007]

current archivist was not among those who originally received the Loy papers.<sup>26</sup> It seems probable that the organization of the archived manuscripts is a product of the archivists themselves, perhaps initially with guidance from Bayer. Any attempt to repiece fragments into a 'whole' is fraught with difficulty; one should not assume that a 'whole' picture can be formed from what exists in the archive. Discontinuity must be permitted as a possible feature of Loy's autobiographical project. The Loy papers are contained in seven file-sized boxes: one box houses her poetry and another holds her designs and drawings. The five remaining boxes are devoted to her autobiographical prose. Of these five, 'Islands' makes up one box, while 'Child' takes up less than half of a box. These prose drafts are each divided into chapter sections with multiple similar typescripts and handwritten drafts. They are grouped together to make up each of Loy's chapter's corresponding folder. Fragments or handwritten notes that appear to belong to either 'Islands' or 'Child' are collected in folders marked 'unidentified'. Neither of these two manuscripts is assigned a date.

Loy rarely gave definitive composition dates to her autobiographical manuscripts. One way to gauge the time-span over which these drafts were written is through the handwriting. Such analysis gives a rough, if not subjective, sense of what was written during her youth and what was composed later. Those pages that appear to be older are written in ink rather than in the ballpoint pen or pencil of her later work. A more effective method of establishing a timeline would be to examine the paper on which the drafts were written. However, some pages seem to have degraded at a much faster rate than others; so a superficial visual examination of pages is misleading. Although some of Loy's handwritten drafts appear on unused address books, day planners, cablegrams, invoice sheets, and tracing paper, many of her manuscripts are

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<sup>26</sup> Patricia C. Willis is currently the curator responsible for YCAL, which houses the Mina Loy Papers.

typed or written on line watermarked or letterhead paper.<sup>27</sup> Often during revisions, Loy crossed out and replaced an original title with a new one, or retrospectively titled a page to indicate its inclusion into a later draft. For example, it would be difficult to say with any certainty if a page titled (by hand) 'Islands' was originally from that manuscript or if the title was assigned at a later date. The only pieces that she consistently dated (and notarised) were her design patents for various inventions; these are mostly from the early 1940s. Loy also signed and dated many of her poems, and some that have publication dates provide examples of what types of paper she used during that year.<sup>28</sup> This proves especially useful in a few examples of prose drafts with handwritten poems on the verso. During the years between 1920 and 1940, Loy moved between New York and Paris. Papers bearing an American watermark, such as 'Cronicon USA' or 'Penwyn Writing', coincide with Loy's periods of residence in the US. As I stated previously, between the years 1926 and 1928, Loy owned her Paris lampshade shop. Therefore, drafts composed on letterhead bearing the shop's name and address must have been written in the years after 1926. It seems unlikely that Loy would have transported large quantities of paper during her journeys across the Atlantic. She appears to have been very economical in her paper usage and written on whatever was available to her at the time of composition.

Often the existing order of Loy's archived manuscripts is misleading. For example, the handwritten prose piece 'Static' was given 1944 as a composition date by the original archivist and indeed '1944' is written in Loy's hand at the bottom of the page.<sup>29</sup> However, closer inspection reveals that '1944' is not a date, but a word count. This is substantiated by an earlier word count farther up the page that reads '1900'. On

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<sup>27</sup> I have found over 10 different types of watermarked pages in the Loy archive. Those I have managed to trace thus far are indicated in the Appendix.

<sup>28</sup> This becomes more difficult when Loy carries over composition dates onto much later typescripts for which there are no original manuscripts.

<sup>29</sup> Loy, 'Static', YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 177, handwritten notebook pages. 'Static' appears to be one of Loy's unpublished short prose works.

the verso of these pages are early pencil versions of two poems from the late 1920s.<sup>30</sup> It is also unusual for Loy to omit the month or day of composition when dating a piece. Therefore I would argue that 'Static' must also have been drafted during the late 1920s and not in 1944. In the 'unidentified' fragments folder in the archive's poetry box, I discovered a fragment of the typescript of 'Lady Laura in Bohemia'. It gives the composition date for this poem as '2<sup>nd</sup> August 1925'.<sup>31</sup> The appendix to *LLB96* lists 'Lady Laura in Bohemia' as having no surviving draft and claims that the poem was composed roughly in 1927.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, the need for a more carefully constructed and reliable chronology of Loy's work is needed, especially for the study of her autobiographical manuscripts, which appear to have been written and revised over many years.

Loy's autobiographies could be read as an aesthetic and thematic break from the poetry that shaped her current literary reputation. However, keen readers might recognise a recurrence of the underlying political and artistic messages of her earlier poems about women's lives in her later prose analyses of her mother's generation. Although Loy has certainly been 'appropriated by American histories' since her death, she was British by birth and her autobiographies react to a specific British cultural experience.<sup>33</sup> Her involvement in international modernist circles and her attraction to a variety of multi-national writers (notably Pound, Joyce and Stein) makes attributing her writing to a national style problematic.<sup>34</sup> These autobiographies and their depiction of Victorian society should lead to an analysis of Loy's potential debt to twentieth-century shifts in the tradition of British autobiographical writing. This study will consider also

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<sup>30</sup> These poems appear to be 'The Widow's Jazz' (composed ca. 1927, published in 1931) and 'Plain Platform' (ca. 1930) (published in *LLB82* as 'Repasped Platform', p. 249).

<sup>31</sup> Loy, 'unidentified fragments', YCAL MSS 6, box 5, folder 149, final page of holograph typescript for 'Lady Laura in Bohemia'.

<sup>32</sup> Conover, 'Notes on the Text', *LLB96*, p. 205.

<sup>33</sup> Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle, 'Introduction', *A History of Twentieth-Century British Women's Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> I address this issue further in Chapter 2.

what impact these autobiographies might have on ongoing scholarship identifying Loy as a ‘modern woman’. As I show in Chapter One, the ‘modern woman’ label made the generalised threat of Loy’s experimental verse and perceptions of her social rebelliousness more specific to her early twentieth-century audience.

Self-censorship appears central to Loy’s revision process. One page from ‘Islands’ cautions: ‘None of the people in this book have ever really existed—although if you look into them deep enough – they are all the same person’.<sup>35</sup> It is left up to the reader to decide if that ‘person’ is a representation of the author, or of someone entirely external to the central, narrative voice. On another handwritten notebook page fragment, Loy has written: ‘If only I could get rid of my mother’.<sup>36</sup> Another fragment reads ‘the jailor-mother has disappeared’.<sup>37</sup> It is dangerous to invest too heavily in these ‘notes’, which emerge from the ‘main’ text as a kind of secret. It would be incorrect also to ignore the possible implication of these textual ‘asides’. These, after all, are what make an archive appealing. Readers who are uncritical of archival practice might feel wrongly that their experience of an unpublished manuscript is not mediated by an editor or an author, and that they are receiving private knowledge about the text’s formation.

Bayer appended a note dated 11 June 1975 to ‘Child’, in which she suggests that ‘this manuscript is completely biographical’.<sup>38</sup> However, she adds that she cannot tell whether any of the autobiographical details have been ‘exaggerated’.<sup>39</sup> It seems likely that Bayer based her assumption on certain factual elements of Loy’s autobiography, such as her childhood in London and the basic structure of her family unit. Yet, Bayer’s caveat, that some of her mother’s narrative might be ‘exaggerated’, hints at a potential distance between the character revealed in ‘Child’ and the authorial figure, Mina Loy.

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<sup>35</sup> Loy, ‘Islands’, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 69, handwritten page.

<sup>36</sup> Loy, ‘Bye-Thoughts’, YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 152, handwritten notebook page.

<sup>37</sup> Loy, ‘Lady Asterisk’, YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 163.

<sup>38</sup> Joella Bayer, note dated 11 June 1975, YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 10.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

What is known about Loy's life—that she was born in 1882 in London, lived and wrote in Florence, Paris and New York during two world wars before moving in 1953 to Aspen, Colorado where she died in 1966—can be sourced from Burke's biography and from Conover's introductory material to Loy's poetry editions.<sup>40</sup> Loy's two marriages, the first to the English painter and photographer Stephen Haweis and the second to the poet Arthur Cravan, as well as the births of her four children (two of whom died in childhood) are also significant, as is her dual racial inheritance (Loy's mother was Christian and her father was a Hungarian Jew).<sup>41</sup> Readers of Loy's autobiographical manuscripts should be aware that although there are certain factual similarities between the characters she describes and members of Loy's family, it cannot be assumed that her narrative is drawn directly from the realities of her childhood. Her manuscript notes often refer to her autobiographical 'self' in the third-person, as in this handwritten fragment from 'Goy':

See the whole of the story of the Israels together—no summary—write incidents  
[.] History of family who does nothing is inexhaustible—we get impatient  
turning out the sag bag and dump all the last in a lump'—<sup>42</sup>

On one level, this appears to be Loy giving herself direction: 'write incidents'. Yet, her use of the pronoun 'we' and her imperative tone seem to arise from a critical figure outside of the writing process—it is Loy berating the author (who is herself) for not representing her homophonic stand-in, 'Goy'. The concern with writing 'incidents', and not a 'history', suggests that the underlying autobiographical process is being scrutinised. Virginia Woolf, in her essays 'The Art of Biography' and 'The New Biography', draws attention to the shift in early twentieth-century biography away from

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<sup>40</sup> Conover, 'Time-Table', *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (Highlands, N.C.: Jargon Society, 1982), pp. lxiii-lxxix. 'Time Table' includes a concise timeline of Loy's biographical data. See also Burke's biography, which is a more accurate source.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Loy, 'Notes on Jews', YCAL MSS 6, box 5, folder 189, verso of typescript page numbered '103'. This page appears to have been misfiled. In fact, it should be returned to the typescript of 'Goy Israels', which is missing page 103.



the histories of great men toward the kinds of personality-revealing ‘incidents’ Loy utilises. Woolf writes of these outmoded histories that ‘many of the old chapter headings—life at college, marriage, career—are shown to be very arbitrary and artificial distinctions’.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Loy’s writing of her own life takes on the appearance of an auto-analysis that jumps without signal from year to year, from formative moment to moment. However, she cannot escape the novelistic convention of writing a life as if it were a fiction driven by plot and character. Often Loy’s conception of a childhood self is reminiscent of a Dickensian ‘exploited’ and ‘endangered’ child, the victim ‘of an uncaring society bent on progress’.<sup>44</sup> Loy’s own attempt at biography—an unfinished verse portrait of Isadora Duncan called ‘Biography of Songge Byrd’—and her interest in Francis Galton’s theory of eugenics might illuminate further discussions of her scientific approach to autobiography.<sup>45</sup> Her autobiographical manuscripts are not a statistical gathering of evidence or an anthropological case study, nor are they strictly ‘spiritual’ in their momentum.

For readers, the appeal of personal papers centres on what they reveal about the public façade of the supposed author—in other words, readers possibly rifle through archives to find and compare their knowledge of the historical ‘MINA LOY’ to their fantasy version, who lurks behind the published texts in the ultimate and wilful act of performance. In a strange way then, the privileging of the archive, this element of ‘witness’, elevates the significance of unpublished material because it *remains* unpublished. And this spectral figure of the author and of her historical counterpart, the unsigning Mina Loy, is created by readers and archivists, critics and disciples as a result

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<sup>43</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘The Art of Biography’, in *Collected Essays*, vol. 4, ed. by Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), p. 226.

<sup>44</sup> Laura C. Berry, *The Child, the State and The Victorian Novel* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Loy, ‘Biography of Songge Byrd’, YCAL MSS 6, box 5, folder 130, partial typescript dated ‘Spring, 1952’ in Loy’s hand. This folder also contains handwritten fragments of the verse biography, composed on pages from an address book. Although *Insel* has biographical elements, it is more easily categorised as a novel or as one of Loy’s autobiographies. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of *Insel*.

of the archive's posthumous life—a life that requires the writer's physical death to bring the ever-evolving, never-ending archive into existence.

Chapter One establishes the scope and focus of this study: to explore the existing 'modern woman' mythology surrounding Loy (the author and historical figure) and to analyse how her unpublished autobiographies might affect the current critical attitude towards her work and life. In seeking to define 'modern' in its early twentieth-century meaning, I will be looking at how and why Loy herself, as well as poets and critics promoting her work, endorsed her status as a 'modern' and a 'modern woman' both during her lifetime and after her death. I draw from the existing debate about the concept and creation of the 'modern woman' and how it relates to the earlier figure of the 'New Woman'. I suspect that Loy bears a relation to both of these categories, and that it is her problematic association with these 'types' that has made her work difficult to place, and is in part responsible for her obscurity and eventual 'rediscovery'. Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' (1914) and 'Aphorisms on Futurism' (1914) hint at her initial political interests. Yet, by the time she wrote her essay 'Modern Poetry' in the 1920s, her original belief in the didactic function of art and literature was beginning to change. Burke's biography of Loy alludes to this shift. However, I intend to offer readings of Loy's unpublished autobiographies as contrary to, even uninterested in, her earlier forays into modernism and Futurism. I read these supposed recollections as more than part of a movement of thought or aesthetics; rather, they portray the inability of a 'modern writer' to exclude the past—they embody the 'make it new' anxiety of Loy's generation and offer no solution but 'consciousness' which, according to Loy, 'has no climax'.<sup>46</sup>

Chapter Two will chart primarily how Loy's reputation has developed within British and American literary criticism. My analysis will also focus on how and why her

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<sup>46</sup> Loy, 'Aphorisms on Futurism', *LLB96*, pp. 149-152 (p. 151).

work has been received differently in Britain and the US by both feminists and traditional scholars. I will begin with Virginia Koudis's *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (1982), the first full-length study of Loy's poetry, as well as criticism written about Loy's work during her lifetime. In his *Little Review* piece on the *Others* anthology (1917), Ezra Pound praised Loy (alongside Marianne Moore) for not 'trafficking in sentiment' and for being 'aridly' 'intellectual'.<sup>47</sup> I am interested in how Pound's label has persisted and how his initial grouping of Loy with Moore as a practitioner of 'logopoeia' has affected critical readings in the last twenty years. A survey of Loy scholarship will allow for a clearer picture of how she has been read and how such readings might influence or be influenced by an analysis of her unpublished autobiographies. I will delve also into how Loy herself contributed to her reputation as the 'modern woman' during the earlier part of her career through her own critical and political writings, as well as through—what might be termed—her 'love poetry'.

Chapter Three compares 'Islands' with 'Child'. Although there are similarities between the two manuscripts, Bayer's assumption that 'Child' predates 'Islands' biases us towards a particular kind of reading—one which privileges 'Islands' as the 'more complete' version of the same narrative, attempted twice but only latterly successful. In this chapter I compare both texts and explore their differences further, while bearing in mind the twenty-year gap between their drafting and redrafting, and I examine how this might reveal Loy's growing distaste with a 'modern' literary agenda. Furthermore, I argue that 'Islands' is a revision of 'Child' and that a close reading of Loy's first chapter 'Hurry' proves this. In both 'Islands' and 'Child', Loy's mother becomes symbolic of many things: religious piety and Evangelicism; Victorian femininity and class-consciousness. Loy positions herself as a victim of her mother's character while simultaneously setting herself ideologically apart from her. Burke has suggested that

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<sup>47</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Marianne Moore and Mina Loy', part of "A List of Books, *The Little Review*", March 1918', in *Selected Prose 1909-1965: Ezra Pound*, ed. by William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 394-395.

Loy uses this relationship to describe an awareness of her own emerging modernity against the fears and proprieties of a receding generation, but that she did not succeed. However, I will argue that the aim of these autobiographies was not to purge Loy of the Victorian era, and its associated maternal censorial voice. Instead, I argue that Loy's purpose was to express the anxiety of belonging to both generations, and to engage with modernity by questioning its possibilities and its limits for the modern writer and for the modern woman.

Chapter Four explores ideas of racial and religious hybridity in 'Goy Israels'. 'Goy' explores Loy's feelings of internal division and exile across the racial lines of her parents' heritage. 'Goy' describes her internalisation of her parents' animosity towards each other, which for Loy becomes more largely symbolic of a tension between the old 'Eastern' and the more modern 'Western' world. She uses this race divide to explain her own sense of cultural displacement within an anti-semitic wartime Europe. The narrative ultimately attempts to unite the two halves (Christian and Jewish) and looks to the future as a celebration of hybridity. Loy sees the culmination of her own intellectual legacy in her daughter with her second husband, the poet Arthur Cravan, as a template for the 'modern' world. This chapter explores her concept of cultural and linguistic hybridity. The long poem 'Anglo Mongrels and the Rose' (1923-1925) predates most of Loy's autobiographical prose, yet it deals with the same childhood racial and religious drama as 'Goy'. This verse narrative is more condensed than her prose versions. My interest in this poem arises from what is omitted and what is preserved in her later prose drafts. Among other things, I will be looking at the physical gaps and pauses in the poem and how they operate in ways that the prose form does not. One recollection of particular interest in 'Goy' describes her mother reading one of her early childhood poems, 'The Gnat and the Daisy', and tearing it up for its supposed licentiousness. A version of this poem appears in 'Goy' (which Loy claims to have reproduced from

memory)—the poem's lines are crossed out and the mother's censoring, damning voice is written over the manuscript text in Loy's hand.

In response to Cravan's mysterious disappearance in 1918, Loy wrote poems and prose about his absence and her widowhood between the early 1920s and the 1950s.<sup>48</sup> Cravan's enigmatic and controversial artistic life contributed (along with the circumstances of his death) to the posthumous creation of his iconic status as a patron saint of Dadaism. Loy's autobiographical memoir, 'Colossus' (ca. 1920s), focuses on and feeds Cravan's mythic reputation while also promoting the movements that would come to identify themselves with his brand of experimentalism. Chapter Five explores how Loy's eulogizing of him (in poems and prose) partly fashioned the icon of Cravan that exists today, and how this version fits in with her other autobiographies—which, among other things, meant to explain the development of artistic genius as something innate and separate from the experimental 'isms' to which genius is often attached. In exploring the allure of the Loy and Cravan myth, I will briefly discuss Antonia Logue's *Shadowbox* (1999), a vaguely biographical novel that ventriloquises Loy's voice as the 'abandoned widow' figure. I will also look at Loy's presence as 'otherworldly' in memoirs of her fellow expatriates and how her involvement in these communities changed after the death of her husband and a change in her writing style.

*Insel* (1991) was written during the mid-1930s while Loy was living in Paris and completed after her return to New York in 1936.<sup>49</sup> On the surface, *Insel* appears to be a biographical account of the life and work of the German Surrealist painter Richard Oelze (Insel). However, Loy's identification with her subject and the narrative's focus on her involvement in his life—the novel ends with Loy's 'narrator' leaving Insel—

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<sup>48</sup> See Burke, pp. 264-265.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

reveal that the novel is another exploration of Loy's own creative 'self'.<sup>50</sup> Oelze's story provides a backdrop for her contemplations of the nature and condition of genius. Loy's other writings on genius, both within and outside of her autobiographies, will also be examined in relation to *Insel*. In Chapter Six I address why *Insel*, and not Loy's other autobiographies, was published. It is perhaps because *Insel* is seen as more complete than Loy's other autobiographies. Was *Insel* considered publishable because the novel concerns itself with her adult life as a 'modern' artist and not with her childhood? Ultimately, I suspect that the selectivity with which Loy's editors have treated her unpublished manuscripts is a result of their desire to foreground her as one of the genius figures she describes in *Insel*.

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<sup>50</sup> I refer to Loy's *Insel* as a 'novel' advisedly. Although none of Loy's autobiographies utilises a traditional novel structure, *Insel* is perhaps the only one that fits loosely into this definition. *Insel* has also been published, and it therefore takes on a 'finished' appearance. It is the only one of Loy's autobiographies that has a discernable plot and an 'ending'. Indeed, Loy finished her typescripts of *Insel* with the words: 'The End'. None of her other autobiographies end in this way.

## Chapter One

### The Making of a 'Modern Woman'

DIE in the Past  
Live in the Future

THE velocity of velocities arrives in starting.

[...]

THE Future is limitless—the past a trail of insidious reactions.

[...]

TODAY is the crisis in consciousness.

CONSCIOUSNESS cannot spontaneously accept or reject new forms, as offered by creative genius; it is the new form, for however great a period of time it may remain a mere irritant—that moulds consciousness to the necessary amplitude for holding it.

[....]

THE Futurist must leap from affirmative to affirmative, ignoring intermittent negations—must spring from stepping-stone to stone of creative explorations; without slipping back into the turbid stream of accepted facts.

[...]

THUS shall evolve the language of the Future.<sup>51</sup>

Mina Loy's first published work, 'Aphorisms on Futurism' (1914), reveals her debt to the founding principles of Italian Futurism as outlined in F.T. Marinetti's 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909). In 'Aphorisms', she redirects Marinetti's infamous cry to 'destroy' 'museums [and] libraries' and to deliver Italy from its 'gangrene of professors, archaeologists, ciceroni, and antiquarians'.<sup>52</sup> Loy targets

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<sup>51</sup> Mina Loy, 'Aphorisms on Futurism', *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (New York: Noonday Press, 1996), pp. 149-152. (Hereafter cited as 'Aphorisms' and LLB96).

<sup>52</sup> F.T. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. by R.W. Flint and trans. by R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), pp. 39-44 (p. 42). Originally published in *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909 (Paris). (Hereafter cited as SW).

Futurism's enthusiasm for aggressive social and artistic revolution at the reader's own consciousness; throughout 'Aphorisms' she refers to her reader as 'You'. This 'You' stands in for an imagined audience that is restricted by the fear of society's censure. According to Loy, 'the mind' is in need of drastic reform; she argues that an individual's personal history must be shed for the mind to achieve its full 'capacity'.<sup>53</sup> The 'past' is limiting and the 'Future' promises the potential for psychic rebirth. She writes that one's mind must not be restricted by an 'abject servitude to [its] perceptive consciousness' nor by 'the mechanical re-actions of the subconsciousness, that rubbish heap of race-tradition'.<sup>54</sup> One's past must be abandoned; it is 'a trail of insidious reactions' that only reflects an uncritical acceptance of experience at 'face value'.<sup>55</sup> In other words, memory's storehouse of associations limits the potential of 'pure' conscious experience. Loy's vision of a pure consciousness echoes Marinetti's assertion that Man is more than 'the revival and extension' of his 'ancestors'.<sup>56</sup>

As with many of Loy's didactic writings, 'Aphorisms' models her plan for a new social order based on the artist's (in this case Futurist artist's) life. Loy's claim that 'THE Futurist can live a thousand years in one poem' demands that 'the people' master the Futurist's separation from the constraints of conventional time.<sup>57</sup> Loy's formulation of time obliterates the present moment, which no longer serves as a crux between the two opposites of the past and the future. According to 'Aphorisms', the mind must exist in an essentially timeless state that is always looking forward; the future replaces the present moment. The 'Future', as Loy describes it, must emerge and continue to emerge in the moment it is conceived. As soon as perception occurs, the mind is propelled forward by the velocity of its own experience. If the 'velocity of velocities arrives in

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<sup>53</sup> Loy, 'Aphorisms', *LLB96*, p. 152.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>56</sup> Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', *SW*, p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> Loy, 'Aphorisms', *LLB96*, p. 150.



starting' then one has to be always beginning in order to live up to Futurism's dynamic principle of existence. Marinetti announced that 'Time and Space died yesterday. [Man is] already living in the absolute, because we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed'.<sup>58</sup> His manifesto suggests that as a result of the mechanized age and, with it, man's newfound power, 'today' does not sufficiently hold the speed at which one experiences life in the modern era. In the absolute, the constructs of time and space have no measure; nothing is relative to their dimensions. Time and space solely define the past, which is forever increasing in respect to the future. The Futurist's (at times absurdly brutal) focus on absolute simultaneity and forward momentum leaves little room for the experience of the present. Loy's reworking of Futurist ideas centres on Man's individual consciousness and its regenerative potential. 'Aphorisms' concludes by prophesying that the 'language of the Future' will be spoken by those who are free of prejudice, shame and any other 'retrograde' behaviours.<sup>59</sup> Loy defines the present as a momentary springboard for the development of a new race with a new language founded on the Futurist-led re-evolution of the future. Although Marinetti's Futurist ideal seems to call for an annihilation of the literary 'I', Loy makes use of Futurist aggression in order to urge a reformulation of her reader's individuality.<sup>60</sup>

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library holds a page of Loy's personal copy of the New York quarterly *Camera Work*, issue 45, in which 'Aphorisms on Futurism' first appeared.<sup>61</sup> Throughout this page, Loy has pencilled the words 'modern' and 'modernism' over the words 'Future' and 'Futurism' respectively.<sup>62</sup> No date is given for these changes; it is likely that they were made sometime after 1916, following

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<sup>58</sup> Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', *SW*, p. 41.

<sup>59</sup> Loy, 'Aphorisms', *LLB96*, p. 152.

<sup>60</sup> F.T. Marinetti, 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature' (1912) in *Selected Poems and Related Prose*, ed. by Luce Marinetti, trans. by Elizabeth R. Napier and Barbara R. Studholme (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 77-80 (p. 79). Marinetti's 'Technical Manifesto' calls for a destruction of the 'I' (man's individual psychology) in literature.

<sup>61</sup> Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature, Mina Loy Papers, MSS 6, box 6, folder 152. (Hereafter cited as YCAL).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Loy's arrival in New York from Florence. In the appendices to the most recent selection of Loy's writing, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996) (hereafter referred to as *LLB96*), the editor Roger L. Conover suggests that '[Loy] probably made these notes after abandoning her Futurist allegiance; although she might have retrospectively preferred to call this piece "Aphorisms on Modernism", I have retained the original title'.<sup>63</sup> The characterisation of Loy's changes as 'notes' understates their significance. As Loy's first appearance in print, 'Aphorisms' serves as a logical starting point in the study of her oeuvre. 'Aphorisms' contributed to Loy's status as an 'international' writer; her ability to explain the workings of Futurism to New York's literati lent her intellectual and artistic credibility.<sup>64</sup> Available biographical information and dated manuscripts suggest that Loy began to write with the intention of publishing after 1914, following her separation from her first husband, the painter Stephen Haweis. During that year, Loy's correspondence with the American writer and socialite Mabel Dodge also supports the theory that she began to write after her exposure to Futurist circles in Florence.<sup>65</sup> In fact, Loy sent three early poems to Dodge in 1914 with the hope that she could place them in a New York literary magazine.<sup>66</sup> In letters written to Dodge, Loy objected to Futurism's contempt for women and to Marinetti's association of the feminine with 'the soiled traces of the years, the crumbling of ruins' and 'the adoration of death'.<sup>67</sup>

By writing 'Aphorisms', Loy tailored Futurist doctrine to her own artistic agenda and in doing so separated herself from its degradation of the feminine. Much of her early poetry was written as a direct rejoinder to Marinetti, with whom she was also

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<sup>63</sup> Roger L. Conover, 'Notes on the Text', in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (New York: Noonday Press, 1996), p. 215.

<sup>64</sup> Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 214.

<sup>65</sup> Burke, pp. 157-164.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 157-158.

<sup>67</sup> F.T. Marinetti, 'Geometric and Mechanical Splendor and the Numerical Sensibility,' (1914) in *SW*, pp. 97-103 (p. 97).

romantically involved. Loy's poems 'Three Moments in Paris' (1915) and 'Sketch of a Man on a Platform' (1915) are critical of Futurism's rendering of power and intellect as inherently masculine and superior to sentimentality and the pure physicality Futurism associated with the feminine. Loy was not the only woman who issued a rejoinder to Futurism's 'scorn for woman'.<sup>68</sup> In 1912, two years before Loy published 'Aphorisms', Valentine de Saint-Point delivered her 'Manifesto of Futurist Woman (Response to F.T. Marinetti)' at a Futurist exhibit in Brussels.<sup>69</sup> However, both Loy and Saint-Point do little to contradict Marinetti's characterisation of femininity as animal and weak, and masculinity as progressively aggressive. Saint-Point writes that woman must return to her 'sublime instinct' of 'violence [and] cruelty' and she praises the Amazons and Furies for their war-lust.<sup>70</sup> She adds that woman can be either mother or lover: they who are 'equal in front of life' 'complete each other'.<sup>71</sup> She concludes:

Instead of reducing man to the slavery of those *execrable sentimental needs*,  
incite your sons and your men to surpass themselves.  
You are the ones who make them. You have all power over them.  
*You owe humanity its heroes. Make them!*<sup>72</sup>

Woman's power is only realised through the men over whom they have influence. While Loy also promotes motherhood as a form of empowerment, she argues that the 'division of women into two classes the mistress, & the mother' is an illusion.<sup>73</sup> Sexuality and maternity combine in forming the 'complete woman'.<sup>74</sup> Her statement,

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<sup>68</sup> Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', *SW*, p. 42.

<sup>69</sup> Janet Lyon, 'Manifestoes from the Sex War', in *Gender in Modernism*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), p. 73. (Hereafter cited as *GoM*)

<sup>70</sup> Valentine de Saint-Point, 'Manifesto of Futurist Woman (Response to F.T. Marinetti)', in *GoM*, pp. 87-91 (pp. 89-90).

<sup>71</sup> Saint-Point, p. 90. In a 1917 Interview by Djuna Barnes, Saint-Point claimed that 'Life is military' and a 'continual drilling'. Her glorification of war extended into her own theory of dance, which she called 'Métachorie'. Interviewed after she had abandoned Futurism, Saint-Point's focus is on desire and movement: the 'military exactness [that] is essential to life and is preparatory for death'. See 'Recruiting for Métachorie: Mme. Valentine de Saint-Point Talks of Her Church of Music', in *Djuna Barnes: Interviews*, ed. by Alice Barry (Washington: Sun and Moon Press, 1985), pp. 223-235.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>73</sup> Mina Loy, 'The Feminist Manifesto' (1914), *LLB96*, p. 154.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' was composed in 1914, but was not published until 1982. Marinetti's essay is taken from *War, the World's Only Hygiene: 1911-1915*. Possibly, the compositions dates for

that ‘women must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved’, is echoed perhaps by Marinetti’s own words in ‘Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine’.<sup>75</sup> According to him, ‘the young modern male...will methodically learn to destroy in himself all the sorrows of the heart, daily lacerating his affections and infinitely distracting his sex with swift, casual contacts with women’.<sup>76</sup> Women must ‘destroy’ wanting to be loved, just as men must similarly ‘destroy’ the will to love women—but only as that love is coded with sentimentality, traditional values and the weakness of ‘Amore’.<sup>77</sup> Loy continued to publish poems drawn from her interactions with Marinetti, and often satirised him and his rival Italian Futurist Giovanni Papini. ‘Lions’ Jaws’, her last poem about her brief involvement with the Futurist movement, was published in 1920 and was written while Loy was living in New York.<sup>78</sup> ‘Lions’ Jaws’ could be read as Loy’s farewell to Futurist ideas and to her life in Italy; the poem also publicises the end of her private relationships with Marinetti and Papini who were ‘far away’ on the Italian ‘Benign Peninsular’.<sup>79</sup>

These facts—Loy’s involvement with Marinetti and Papini, the details of her correspondence with Dodge and the manuscripts she sent to Dodge for publication—support the theory that Loy’s contact with Futurism sparked the beginning of her literary career. However, Futurism’s influence on Loy is complex. Her initial response to the Futurist aim for newness of form and subject matter led to Loy’s later meditations on the ‘modern’ artist’s relationship to both their art and audience. Arguably, Conover’s reading of Loy’s handwritten changes to ‘Aphorisms’ as a break from Futurist ideas and a move in favour of ‘modernism’ reflects the emergence of biographical ‘fact’, and a growing consensus among Loy critics about the direction of her work, during his

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Loy’s manifesto and Marinetti’s essay overlap. Carolyn Burke’s biography details their involvement during the year 1914. See Burke, pp. 165-167.

<sup>75</sup> Loy, ‘Feminist Manifesto’, *LLB96*, p. 155.

<sup>76</sup> Marinetti, p. 92.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Roger L. Conover, ‘Notes on the Text’, *LLB96*, pp. 186-188.

<sup>79</sup> Loy, ‘Lions’ Jaws’, *LLB96*, pp. 46-50 (p. 46).

assembly of *LLB96*. By the time Conover wrote his editorial note to ‘Aphorisms on Futurism’, Loy scholars had already dubbed her a rediscovered modern and modernist. His reading of Loy as a onetime Futurist assumes that she did in fact have an ‘allegiance’ to Futurism. Loy’s involvement in Futurism locates her at a pivotal juncture in the evolution of modernism and its avant-gardes.

Loy’s copy of ‘Aphorisms’ could be viewed as an artefact that anticipates her later essays on modernism and on modern poetry. However, this type of reading neglects Loy’s revision of Futurism within her work and the implicit relationship between her substituted terms, modernism and Futurism. On one level, Loy’s replacements suggest an innate difference between ‘Futurism’ and ‘modernism’. However, the majority of her text remains unchanged. Although ‘Future’ and ‘Futurism’ have been replaced, the text in which Loy defined these terms remains otherwise the same. Therefore, the concepts of ‘modern’ and ‘Future’, as well as ‘modernism’ and ‘Futurism’, must also have a common investment in newness and progressive change. As Conover suggests, on the surface Loy’s revision of ‘Aphorisms’ indicates her own brief and momentary interest in early twentieth-century ‘isms’ as suitable forums for her own literary project. The erasure of ‘Futurism’ and the substitution of ‘modernism’ imply an interchangeability of one idea for the next. The revisions themselves have greater implications than Loy’s refutation of Futurism; her replacements serve as a caution to her critics and readers. If we read Loy’s changes as a conversion to modernism, they alone do not argue for her place within it. Instead, her substitutions argue for a broader and more flexible consideration of her work than what exists at present.

I would contend that, since her death, Loy has been critically written over in favour of the ‘modern’. Her revisions neither prove nor disprove her current critical status as a ‘modernist poet’ or a ‘modern woman’. More so, they call for a broader

definition of 'modern', as something that is always being revised. In a sense, the transitional quality of Loy's changes suggests that her literary engagement with conceptions of the modern was continuously being rethought. These changes expand onto a larger argument, hinting at the problematic nature of generic labels involved in the attempt, for example, to define the 'modern' and the 'modernist'. Perhaps Loy's changes to the *Camera Work* text were a sign of the 'modernity' of her 'Aphorisms' before she herself made the replacements. Can one draw a line between Futurism and modernism? The avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century—Imagism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Cubism, and so on—combine in our current concept of modernism. The interplay between vying avant-gardes was undoubtedly necessary to the revising of 'newness'.

In June of 1919, John Cournos wrote a kind of obituary to Vorticism and Futurism in *The Little Review*, which claimed that the witnessing of everyday realities of war was 'bound to kill the sister arts' of the related movements.<sup>80</sup> Earlier, in a 1917 article for *The Egoist* entitled 'The Death of Futurism', Cournos nearly blamed Futurism and Vorticism for the war, claiming that 'war was in the mind of both [movements]'.<sup>81</sup> Margaret Anderson, the editor of *The Little Review*, disagreed with the 1919 piece and urged either Pound or Wyndham Lewis to take Cournos up on his 'ancient sentimentalisms'.<sup>82</sup> It seems probable that Anderson would not have published Cournos's article, and then encouraged a rejoinder, if she believed that Futurism and Vorticism were no longer relevant. Indeed, in a letter to Anderson written in January of 1921, Pound wrote: 'You might do worse than reproduce the manifesto enclosed issued

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<sup>80</sup> John Cournos, 'The Death of Vorticism', *The Little Review*, vol. 6, no. 2 (June 1919), 46-48.

<sup>81</sup> John Cournos, 'The Death of Futurism', *The Egoist* (Jan 1917), 6-7.

<sup>82</sup> Margaret Anderson, *The Little Review*, vol. 6, no. 2, (June 1919) 48. Margaret Anderson's editor's note immediately follows Cournos's article.

at the contra-Marinetti demonstration yesterday'.<sup>83</sup> He was referring to the Dadaist manifesto, which *The Little Review* published in its January-March issue of that year.<sup>84</sup> Pound's correlation between Dadaism and Futurism's founder is intriguing, especially considering that he links the founding principles of these movements twelve years after the 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' was published. Loy's replacement of 'Futurism' for 'modernism' suggests that the latter, more inclusive term incorporates such shifts within early twentieth-century aesthetic movements. This ongoing process of Loy repositioning herself in terms of artistic movements should also be examined in relation to Loy's oeuvre, especially within her later prose writing and her autobiographies.

Currently, critical accounts of Loy's poetry converge on her status as a modernist writer. If one were only to read Loy's writing from 1914 to 1929, that body of work creates a very different image of Loy's aesthetics than is visible from her writing between 1914 and the late 1950s. Recent criticism is more likely to engage with Loy as a 'modernist', thinking it the clearest picture with the most appropriate critical designation. I would argue that critics have limited their lens of Loy's work to a few specific texts. Most often Loy scholars include her in a very specific modernism—the New York Greenwich Village or Paris artist and writer communities of the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s. Few critics discuss Loy's poetry and prose written after 1925; those that do engage with her later work consider it inferior to her earlier, more widely published writing. This has resulted in distorted critical images of Loy's career; frequently their focal point, 'modernism', magnifies her into a specifically modernist writer. One example of the ideological reflectivity of revisionist scholarship comes from feminist attempts to restore Loy's alleged position within the modernist movement;

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<sup>83</sup> Letter from Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson, 17 January 1921, in *The Letters of Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson: The Little Review Correspondence*, ed. by Thomas L. Scott and Melvin J. Friedman (New York: New Directions, 1988), pp. 261-262.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

these readings often operate under the assumption that Loy has been marginalized by retrospective studies of ‘major’ modernist authors. However, this process of critical reinstatement underlines Loy’s obscurity and distorts Loy’s historical moment with a superimposed critical prejudice. Reflection of a critic’s position—which includes their historical and cultural moment as well as their individual idiosyncrasies—can be found in all, not only feminist, scholarship. It is the intention of this study to address a broader selection than has been previously discussed by including Loy’s unpublished autobiographies. I do not imagine that the resulting picture of Loy’s work will be more ‘accurate’ than previous critical images of Loy; rather this study will provide different foci and give Loy’s readers numerous critical vantage points to consider.

To return to an earlier question: how could one read Loy’s substitutions of ‘modern’ for ‘Future’ or ‘modernism’ for ‘Futurism’? What clues might surface about Loy’s idea of the ‘modern’ and ‘modernism’ if one were to read her aphorisms under the title ‘Aphorisms on Modernism’? The terms ‘modernism’, ‘modernity’ and the ‘modern’ share a common source. Each word implies ‘newness’ in different contexts; at various times each word has provided a variety of meanings. Time-frames around a ‘period’ of ‘modernist’ writing have been scrutinized and expanded. A rough consensus among scholars might mark the ‘beginning’ of modernism as the 1890s and locate its ‘end’ in the 1930s. Inevitably, works that could be considered ‘modernist’ fall outside these years. A similar difficulty arises if a ‘modernist’ writer publishes in a variety of imprints, some but not all of them modernist. Does that exclude him or her from being considered a modernist writer? In part, our current idea of modernism depends on the preferences of editors and patrons during the ‘modernist period’. Scholars might be more likely to contend that Loy was a modernist writer because the more canonical



modernists, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, argued over her poetry and its successes and failures.<sup>85</sup>

Where do we place authors who wrote during this ‘period’ whose work we cannot align with the textual ‘features’ of modernism? Many studies offer lists of ‘typically’ modernist techniques as a means of classification. Such lists might include, among other things: a privileging of the subjective over the objective, non-linear time frames, fragmentary narrative, a breakdown of language, the use of polyphony and a distillation of words to focus on ‘the thing itself’.<sup>86</sup> Such simple definitions do not hold; one has only to look at a few examples to see that such a categorization proves inadequate. As with all classifications, defining a ‘typical’ modernist text as one which has some of the characteristics listed above also ignores the unique and complex process of each individual author’s treatment of language and form.

One common historical explanation of modernism’s genesis is that it began as an anti-bourgeois repudiation of Victorian writing. Another of modernism’s purported origins is the rise of the European and American metropolis, and within it, communities of exiled immigrants. The concrete experiences of the First and Second World Wars, as well as the political engagements of socialist and feminist movements during this time, possibly shaped the rise of modernist writing. Issues of gender, nationality or internationalism and early twentieth-century developments in technology are arguably also contributing factors. In one sense, we must resist treating modernism as if it were a condition that can only be diagnosed by an objective expert after the ‘disease’ has progressed. However, it is difficult to detach discussions of modernism from a writer’s ‘symptoms’ or ‘risk factors’; their individual histories make up the rise and decline of a

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<sup>85</sup> I address Loy’s critical history further in Chapter Two.

<sup>86</sup> Certainly these ‘characteristic features’ of modernist writing are debated in textbooks or scholarly grids of modernism. A few (among many) notable studies of modernism are: Lawrence Rainey’s *Institutions of Modernism* (1998); Peter Nicholls’ *Modernisms* (1995); *Modernism*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (1978); and *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levenson (1999). *The Cambridge Companion* includes two mentions of Loy: p. 188 and p. 207. In both instances she is part of a list of other women modernists.

kind of modernist 'epidemic'. Attempts to demarcate modernism by historical, literary or political changes face two underlying difficulties. The first is the claim that modernism was an observable 'phenomenon' within a specific set of early twentieth-century 'conditions'. Secondly, our conceptions of modernism have been complicated and blurred by an historical knowledge of artistic movements that succeeded and broke from modernist techniques. Recent studies of modernism are inevitably influenced by an awareness of the 'post-modern'. Therefore, where we divide the two, modernism and postmodernism, affects how we conceptualise each in relation to the other.

Perhaps a more useful consideration of modernism is its relationship to 'modernity'. Although the term 'modern' in the sixteenth century referred to a break from medievalism, 'modern' for a late nineteenth-century audience suggested 'improved', 'up-to-date', or in other words 'beyond contemporary'.<sup>87</sup> Ironically, as soon as one names a thing 'new,' it begins to be less 'modern'. Modernity, similarly, cannot be pinned down as a simple preoccupation with the 'modern'; it too fluctuated. The experience of modernity, either in response to the 'modern' cityscape, 'modern' warfare or the 'modern' media of film and recorded sound, infuses a great deal of modernist writing with a sense of what Charles Baudelaire refers to in his 1863 essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' as 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent'.<sup>88</sup> Baudelaire's meditation on the historicity of perception exalts the present moment as a legitimate subject for art.

That is not to say that all modernist writers responded to the 'modern' experience uniformly. Some, like Marinetti, embraced the disinfectant potential of war and revolution.<sup>89</sup> Others, like Eliot, distrusted visions of a modern political and social world. However one gauges the modernist writer's individual reaction to modernity, his

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<sup>87</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (New York: Verso, 1999), p. 31.

<sup>88</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (1863), trans. by Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon Press, 1964), p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', *SW*, p. 42.

or her formal and linguistic reactions to a shifting, ever 'modern'-ising experience serves as a loose means to unify the modernist movement. Loy's choice to replace Futurism with modernism can be read as her own modernization of an 'absolute'—timeless, indefinite—'Future'. Futurism's opposition of the past and future, and its implications for the creative act, are resolved by Loy's replacement of the 'Future' with the process of modernity. In other words, modern is a gradual move towards, and in view of, a possible future. Modern, in Loy's revisions, is less abstract than the Futurist 'Future'; modernity allows for, in fact requires, an experience of the present. By 'modernist' constructs, the present overlaps with the past and future; the present is the fluctuation of consciousness.

As I mentioned earlier, Loy's familiarity with Italian Futurist rhetoric, and her ability to explain its tenets, elevated her intellectual and 'international' status among her contemporaries. American modernism's debt to some foreign (generally European) artists can be traced back to their involvement in patron-led circles of the New York avant-garde. Loy's own hybridity—British by birth, she lived in France, Germany and Italy and could speak and write fluently in the languages of those countries—allowed her to mix freely with both the French-and the English-speaking contingents of New York's literary circles. Loy's hybridity plays a crucial role in her status, then and now, as representative of the 'modern woman'.

Controversy surrounded *Others* magazine's publication of Loy's 'Love Songs' in 1915, an eroticised account of her love affairs with Marinetti and Papini. Loy's arrival in New York in 1916 was met with interest from both the literary circles of Greenwich Village and the American press. In an effort to discover the 'modern woman', the *New York Evening Sun* interviewed Loy early in 1917; the piece ran under the heading: 'Mina Loy, Painter, Poet and Playwright, Doesn't Try to Express Personality by Wearing Odd Looking Draperies—Her Clothes Suggest the Smartest

Shops, but Her Poems Would Have Puzzled Grandma'.<sup>90</sup> In *Becoming Modern*, Carolyn Burke suggests that Loy's credentials for modernity included writing free verse, making her own street and stage clothes, and being able to tell *Evening Sun* readers 'why futurism is and where it came from'.<sup>91</sup> A mixture of internationalism, intellect, sexuality and dexterity with both 'high' and commercial art forms embodied what appeared to be the modern way of life. In the interview, Loy claimed that 'the modern flings herself at life and lets herself feel what she does feel; then upon the very tick of the second she snatches the images of life that fly through her brain'.<sup>92</sup> At the end of the interview the reporter observed that Loy was 'always half-way through the door into Tomorrow' and although the wording of the article reveals an anxiety in the way the interviewer conceives of her subject, Loy is cast as undoubtedly modern.<sup>93</sup> Conover's citation of the *Evening Sun* article in his introduction to *LLB96* aligns Loy poetry with the myth of the modern woman: 'No natural history contains her habitat...if she isn't the modern woman, who is, pray?'.<sup>94</sup> The modern also, according to this definition, has no past, no origin, and has sprung freely and unnaturally from the spontaneous moment in which she exists. Referring to the *Evening Sun* interview, Burke remarks:

Yet in the process of explaining how one went about becoming modern, Mina omitted any discussion of those vexing issues—family, marital status, children and finances—as if the new woman were exempt from such concerns. She avoided the subject of her London childhood and ultraconservative parents [...] Similarly, the interview fails to mention the demise of her marriage [...] nor does it refer to Mina's two young children, left with their nurse in Florence, or to the financial support required for the new woman to keep flinging herself at life.<sup>95</sup>

Although Burke uses the terms interchangeably, the 'new woman' and the 'modern' do

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<sup>90</sup> 'Do You Strive to Capture the Symbols of Your Reactions? If Not You Are Quite Old Fashioned', *New York Evening Sun*, 13 February 1917, p. 10, quoted by Burke, pp. 8-9.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., quoted by Conover in his introduction to *LLB96*, p. xvi.

<sup>95</sup> Burke, p. 9.

not signify the same thing. Loy's description of the 'modern' does not involve itself with the constraints of femininity. It does not offer 'modernity' as a solution to the everyday lives of women; rather the act of being modern rejects the premise of such an existence, and exhorts the reader to live not 'as your grandmother thought you ought to...according to the rules'.<sup>96</sup> It is true that much of Loy's early writing was inspired by the early twentieth-century 'woman question'. However, over the course of her writing life her apparent willingness to be involved in feminist debates waned considerably, perhaps in part due to the limitations the qualifier 'woman' imposed on being 'modern'. How did Loy's own idea of the 'modern' and the construct of Loy as the modern woman relate to evolving debates about the New Woman?

The *fin-de-siècle* New Woman predates the 'modern woman' of the 1917 *Evening Sun* article. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the terms 'modern woman' and 'New Woman' were used synonymously in both Britain and the US.<sup>97</sup> Yet by the time Loy was interviewed, the implications of 'modern' had already changed. 'Modern' had evolved; it no longer reflected the nineteenth-century social climate in which the New Woman was first named. What, then, is the twentieth-century modern woman's inheritance from the New Woman? Although there were earlier allusions in the public and press to a similarly revisionary woman, the term 'New Woman' was coined in a series of articles by the British novelist Ouida and the women's reform writer Sarah Grand in 1894.<sup>98</sup> Ideas of what the New Woman represents are inseparable both from the original discourse in which she was 'named' and from late twentieth-century readings of her textual manifestations. That is not to say that the New Woman was an invention solely of male and female authors or of the

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<sup>96</sup> *Evening Sun* article, quoted in Burke, p. 9.

<sup>97</sup> One example is Ella Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), published in the same year that the term 'New Woman' was coined (see note 46 below).

<sup>98</sup> See Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 9-11 and 'The "New Woman"', in *The New Woman: Women's Voices, 1880-1918* (hereafter cited as *NWV*) ed. by Juliet Gardiner (London: Collins & Brown, 1993), pp. 6-7 for an fuller history of the term 'New Woman'.

press. However, the public visibility of both the published writer and the political activist has led to many suffragists, novelists, poets, playwrights and social reformers being thought to represent, in the 1890s and in subsequent decades, the 'New Woman'. It would be inaccurate to characterise a prototypical New Woman as one who demanded higher education and the right to vote, or defied Victorian ideals of beauty by wearing practical dresses and cutting her hair short.<sup>99</sup> Yet some New Women authors and activists supported such challenges to accepted views of femininity and female sexuality. It would be incorrect to assume that the deceptively unifying term 'New Woman' correlates to an ideologically homogeneous group of women. For example, motherhood was an issue on which New Women in the early twentieth century were divided. Some favoured the view that women's *raison d'être* was maternity. Others attacked such purist definitions of femininity and disputed eugenicist pseudo-scientific beliefs that women's education or work would harm their ability to reproduce.<sup>100</sup> What is clear is that if some form of the New Woman did in fact *exist*, her image was galvanised and popularised by the press. The changing fascination of turn-of-the-century British newspapers with the New Woman generated, as much as it reacted to, an environment of social change. The anxiety of a real or imagined restrictive Victorian society towards the New Woman revolved around her disruption of traditional discourses on femininity, masculinity, sex, marriage and family.<sup>101</sup> The association of change and destabilization with the icon of the New Woman became a political tool that

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<sup>99</sup> See Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham, 'Introduction', *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930*, ed. by Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-4.

<sup>100</sup> Angelique Richardson's *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) provides several examples of women novelists writing about heredity and eugenics. She writes: 'The converging ideologies of degeneration and eugenics provided the novel with a new romance plot by replacing 'love and marriage' with marriage as a mediator of genealogy' (p. 86).

<sup>101</sup> An article by C. Morgan-Dockerell in *The Humanitarian* vol. III (January-June 1896) entitled 'Is the New Woman a Myth?' asks: 'Is the nineteenth century new woman a myth, as so many people aver—a figment of the journalistic imagination, according to the *Spectator*? Is she, indeed, none other than an intensely aggravated type of the unwomanly, unlovable, unlovely, untidy, undomesticated, revolting, shrieking, man-hating shrew of all the centuries?' Morgan-Dockerell later defends the New Woman as better suited to the duties of wife and mother than the 'normal woman'. See pp. 16-19, in *NWW*.

was variously manipulated by nineteenth-century New Women, ‘anti-feminists’, and the press. The New Woman’s political responsibility was to lead society in reinterpreting and dismantling prevailing ideologies of femininity. The modern woman, in an early twentieth-century context is, in a sense, more ‘new’ than the New Woman of the *fin de siècle*. Her modernness aligns itself with other simultaneously occurring aspects of the forward motion of modernity. Margaret Kornitzer’s *The Modern Woman and Herself* (1932) suggests that the modern woman must adapt to an evolving twentieth-century society. She writes:

For to-day many women are further than ever from knowing what they want. They do not realise that their new wide horizons make necessary a wider self-knowledge. It is not that a new kind of woman has been produced within a few decades or so. We are not new. But our circumstances are different.<sup>102</sup>

Kornitzer’s denial of ‘new[ness]’ could be read as the modern woman’s resistance to being identified with the New Woman of a previous generation. To a greater degree, the modern woman separated herself from the expectations of a declining Victorian ideology; increased migration to big cities offered new sexual and social possibilities to unmarried women.<sup>103</sup> If one were to give in to the myths of the literary salons of the 1910s and the 1920s, the modern female artist shared the same sexually liberated discourse as her male counterparts. Expectations of marriage and family life were bourgeois; for the ‘modern woman’, her life as an individual took precedence. That individuality was not uncomplicated. Kornitzer claims that modern women are ‘pathologically aware of themselves—or rather, not of themselves, but of an inherently wrong conception of themselves’.<sup>104</sup> She identifies the modern woman’s generation as

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<sup>102</sup> Margaret Kornitzer, *The Modern Woman and Herself* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932), p 17.

<sup>103</sup> Kornitzer, pp. 50-56.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

one that is 'intensely self-conscious' within 'a self-conscious civilisation'.<sup>105</sup> According to her, the modern woman 'cannot go back and forget'.<sup>106</sup>

Loy's poem series 'Love Songs' and her 1914 'Feminist Manifesto' both illustrate the qualities of New Woman writing: they discuss women's sexual desire and defiantly depict heterosexual love from a subjectively reformist female perspective. She exhorts women to 'Leave off looking to men to find out what you are not' but to 'seek within yourselves to find out what you are', and states that 'men and women are enemies...the only point at which the interests of the sexes merge is the sexual embrace'.<sup>107</sup> However, Loy chose not to publish the 'Feminist Manifesto' during her lifetime and 'Love Songs' was re-arranged and released in varying degrees of explicitness over a period of about ten years. The original version, which appeared in *Others* in 1915 prior to Loy's residence in New York, contained only the first four of what would ultimately number thirty-four sections. An entire issue of *Others*, appearing in 1917, devoted itself to running the complete sequence as 'Songs to Joannes'.<sup>108</sup> The popularity and scandal created by the erotic, syntactically experimental poems made Loy a target for praise as well as censure. Loy's biographer has suggested that it is for this reason that while assembling her first collection of poetry, *Lunar Baedeker* [sic] (1923), Loy chose to excise two-thirds of her 'Songs'.<sup>109</sup> Yet the revision and selection process that went into *Lunar Baedeker* as well as the shift in Loy's poetic style and political focus away from 'feminist' concerns, suggests that she was revising not only her public image as poet and writer, but also her own private interests.

Readings of Loy's writing during the 1910s and the 1920s as indicative of a 'modern woman' platform are useful to a degree, but they do not reflect the complex,

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Loy, 'The Feminist Manifesto', *LLB96*, p. 154.

<sup>108</sup> Loy, 'Songs to Joannes', *Others* 3 (April 1917).

<sup>109</sup> Burke, p. 322.



varying relationship of such ideas to Loy's entire oeuvre. They neglect Loy's wavering commitment to her own 'feminist' work. Burke observes that Loy fails to mention her children and her husband in the *Evening Sun* interview. Burke also contends that Loy, a representative 'new woman', was not 'exempt from such [female] concerns' as marriage and family. However, Loy's move away from writing satires about women's inequality towards her later poems about the aesthetics of modern art suggests that Loy did in fact 'exempt' herself (at least in her poetry) from the roles of wife, lover and mother. Although she was solely responsible for raising and providing for her children after the early 1920s, Loy's work from this period excludes the domestic themes of her earlier 'Italian' poetry. In her poems about the artistic advances of Joyce or Stein, Loy speaks from the perspective of a modern artist, and is no more gendered within the poem than are her subjects. To a degree, the status of 'genius' in Loy's terms avoids characterisations of the male or the female. It is possible that Loy does not refer to herself as a 'modern woman' but rather as a 'modern' in the *Evening Sun* interview because she believed that modernity promised an intellectual equality for women writers of the modern era. Also it is possible that feminism ceased to be useful to Loy's own conception of the modern writer, or that such ideas came to be as *passé* as the many other 'isms' Loy witnessed and would eventually abandon. If, as Loy believed, a genius belonged outside of social constraints, then perhaps the identifying of a 'modern' by their gender resists the 'outsider' position that in part defined Loy's ideas about genius.<sup>110</sup>

*The Last Lunar Baedeker* (1982) (hereafter referred to as *LLB82*) was published over twenty years after *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables* (1958) (hereafter referred to as *LLBT*) went out of print. It introduced Loy's poetry to a new generation of readers and was the edition on which much of Loy scholarship before the late 1990s was based.

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<sup>110</sup> Chapter Six examines Loy's writings about genius.

LLB82 includes a section of Loy's previously unpublished autobiographies that Conover has selected under the heading 'Ready Mades'.<sup>111</sup> Conover's title 'Ready Mades' alludes to Marcel Duchamp's Dadaist 'sculptures' and is meant to connect Loy's work to Duchamp's artistic techniques. However, the label 'Ready Mades' is misleading, as her text fragments are neither 'found' nor 'anti-art' (in the Duchampian sense), pre-fashioned by Loy (as in mass-produced 'readymade' clothing), or free-standing (that is, without context). Mined from hundreds of manuscript pages, Conover has excerpted six brief and discontinuous passages from the typescripts of two of Loy's autobiographies, 'Islands in the Air' (hereafter referred to as 'Islands') and 'The Child and the Parent' (hereafter referred to as 'Child'), and collected them under the heading 'Notes on Childhood'. Some examples are:

...My pipe with the albino fly molded beneath the bowl introduced me to the extremes of society—eccentric starvelings among the geniuses of the Verein.

\* \* \*

...I had the art of animating ideas in a universe at once within and outside the real world. For the things I saw appeared to no one else, horsehair sofas turning into ships.

\* \* \*

...I used to believe I could create flawless people by holding a dove's egg under my armpit.<sup>112</sup>

These 'Notes' have been taken out of context and allowed to float freely. In this format, the fragments do not appear to be part of a larger narrative. The first fragment, part of Loy's description of a year spent studying art in Munich, is taken from Chapter Ten of 'Islands'.<sup>113</sup> As it appears in 'Notes on Childhood' this excerpted phrase suggests that Loy adopted a bohemian way of life among the 'geniuses of the Verein' and was

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<sup>111</sup> Conover's selection of Loy's writing, 'Ready Mades', was published in *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (Highlands, N.C.: The Jargon Society, 1982), pp. 311-322.

<sup>112</sup> Loy, 'Notes on Childhood', in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (Highlands, N.C.: The Jargon Society, 1982), p. 314. (Hereafter cited as *LLB82*).

<sup>113</sup> Loy, 'Islands in the Air', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 69, pp. 137-156. (Hereafter cited as 'Islands').

‘introduced’ into their company because she, too, was an eccentric.<sup>114</sup> However, in the rest of Chapter Ten’s archived typescript, Loy mocks her own attempt at posing as a genius (remarking that she would rather appear as an ‘amateur lunatic’ than as ‘amateur baggage’) and she rejects the aesthetics of the Munich artists.<sup>115</sup>

An elderly countess who having seen me in the street and decided ‘there goes somebody’ insisted on meeting me—or the pipe?

German Art being beyond the pale of my shadowy Preraphaelites [sic], I was entirely without aesthetic allegiance to any trends among a Bavarian intelligentsia; handsome, warm-hearted bringing a comprehensive viewpoint to horizons vast in comparison to those of English students.<sup>116</sup>

Unlike the published ‘Notes on Childhood’ version, Loy’s manuscript problematises her description of the artists of the Verein by placing the word ‘geniuses’ in quotation marks.<sup>117</sup> Her description of these ‘geniuses’, returned to its original context, draws attention to the self-conscious performance of being a ‘genius’ in which she and her circle participated. She may also have doubted her fellow artists’ claim to genius; or her use of quotation marks might signal a distinction between the ‘modern genius’ and the ‘genius’ of the late nineteenth century. Her autobiographies also specify that she preferred Pre-Raphaelite art to the modern aesthetic innovations of the Schwabing quarter.

‘Notes on Childhood’'s page-long excision ‘Ladies in an Aviary’ is taken from Chapter Seven of the manuscript ‘Child’.<sup>118</sup> ‘Child’ is divided into two parts; both the ‘Child’ and the ‘Parent’ halves navigate the origins of the alleged parent-child tension within Loy’s family and describe her parents’ married lives before her birth. Chapter Seven, from the ‘Parent’ section, depicts the women of Loy’s mother’s generation and

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<sup>114</sup> ‘Verein’ is the German word for a ‘union’ or ‘association’ and refers to the Künstlerinnenverein (Society of Female Artists’ School) in Munich where Loy studied art under Angelo Jank in 1900. Burke details Loy’s year in Munich in *Becoming Modern*, pp. 53-64.

<sup>115</sup> Loy, ‘Islands’, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 69, p. 153.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp. 155-156.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>118</sup> Loy, ‘The Child and the Parent’, YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 15, pp. 35-45. (Hereafter cited as ‘Child’).

caricatures their sexual and psychological restraints. However, all of the biographical detail has been removed from the published selection from 'Ready Mades'. Instead, it appears to be a general sketch about women's expectations in marriage. The published fragment excludes Loy's vested interests in the power struggle that she suggests took place in her own Victorian childhood. In Chapter Seven she also writes:

There may seem to be a visionary confusion about this showing of both child and woman so much in the likeness of birds, but woman has to some extent the same volant consciousness, the same dilatoriness of the ego to settle upon itself as we found in the budding intelligence, and it is undeniable that these ladies also spend their time in watching for words to materialize, in a flesh-trap more nearly than the condition of man, recalling the snare for the dove.<sup>119</sup>

Throughout both 'Child' and 'Islands' Loy uses the image of a bird to describe the child's incipient consciousness. In the above quotation Loy suggests that both the child's undifferentiated 'bird-spirit' and Victorian women lack concrete individuality and cohesive selfhood. For the child a lack of fixedness is emancipatory and divine; the child is capable of escape from objective reality through imagination (as in the 'horsehair sofas turning into ships'). In the case of the Victorian woman, adulthood traps her in 'the cage' of her own feminised body, of which she does not have ownership. Marriage is her jailor, and the 'sugar-drama' of her purchase makes her dependent on others for direction and identity, much like Loy's child figure.<sup>120</sup>

Throughout her autobiographies Loy claims that she inherited the psychological pressures of her mother's generation, and the 'Ladies' section from 'Child' paints Loy as a pained successor to gender roles she associates with the Victorian era.

By the time I was four years old, I knew how to read. My life as a scholar terminated at that age. I could not guess when I came to 'Z is for Zantippe' who was a great scold that again the methodical accidents of destiny's subconscious had, through my first scrap of knowledge predicted the death of the will.

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<sup>119</sup> Loy, 'Child', YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 15, p. 38.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

Now that I had begun to show off, I was only an actor on the common stage.<sup>121</sup>

The ‘accidents’ of destiny prophesy Loy’s assumption into the confines of femininity—Zantippe, the wife of Socrates, is invoked as a symbol of one who lacks reason. Loy contrasts ‘knowledge’ with the real ‘scholarly’ learning of an infant’s unmediated experience. True ‘knowledge’ is lost as soon as society intervenes; Loy is socialised and reduced to a pre-scripted performance by learning how to read. Loy’s Victorian childhood, as it is staged in her autobiographies, deepens the reader’s understanding of her ideas about the ‘modern woman’ construct. Loy offers her mother as a personal and haunting frame of reference against which she comes to define her own femininity. Loy’s autobiographies frequently engage with ideas of performance as in her reference to her childhood self as ‘an actor’.<sup>122</sup> Throughout her autobiographies her awareness of composing a ‘self’ is signalled to the reader by Loy’s intervening ‘older’ narrative voice. Rather than a complete rejection of Victorian taboos, Loy’s chapter ‘Ladies in an Aviary’ sets the stage for a series of complex breaks from the repressive atmosphere of her childhood. She accepts the ongoing influence of her mother’s repressive control—the narrative voice is visibly disrupted by the mother’s ‘Voice’ throughout the text—while also firmly placing her mother’s ideas in a Victorian ideology.<sup>123</sup>

After the early 1920s, Loy’s only significant engagement with gender politics takes place in her autobiographies and in her autobiographical poem, ‘Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose’ (1923-1925).<sup>124</sup> Loy describes the physical maturing of her own body and records her mother’s disapproval of her emerging sexuality. Later chapters of ‘Islands’ also recount several of Loy’s adolescent romances and her bewildering conversations

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<sup>121</sup> Loy, ‘Islands’, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 62, p. 29. Slightly different versions of this section appear in both ‘Child’ and in ‘Islands’. The above quotation is more succinct than ‘Child’ version and is taken from ‘Islands’.

<sup>122</sup> Loy, ‘Child’, ‘Chapter 5, The Will’, YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 13, pp. 25-31 (p. 31).

<sup>123</sup> In Loy’s autobiographies she refers to her mother’s censoriousness as the ‘Voice’. The ‘Voice’, and its abuses, undercut the narrative self’s childhood recollections. Chapter 3 explores this issue further.

<sup>124</sup> I discuss ‘Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose’, and its relationship with Loy’s autobiographical manuscript ‘Goy Israels’, in Chapter Four.

with other young girls about sex and the female orgasm.<sup>125</sup> Loy's analysis of her mother's generation and its effect on her own early experience of femininity is the only significant part of Loy's later oeuvre in which she clearly positions herself as a feminised body within her text. Returned to their original context, these 'ready made' 'Notes on Childhood' prove to be fault lines within Loy's autobiographies that mark shifts in her evolving narrated consciousness. Perhaps that is why the excerpts were chosen and published. However, reading around these fragments recontextualises the claim that 'Notes on Childhood' implicitly makes for Loy's untroubled move towards modernity—her wearing a pipe and performing childhood acts of transformative genius—within the tense, embattled and uncertain territory Loy claims moulded her budding character.

However, the most glaring claim for Loy's 'modernity' is the 'Ready Made' titled 'Aphorisms on Modernism' in *LLB82*.<sup>126</sup> Rightly, *LLB96*'s 'Aphorisms on Futurism' retained the word 'Futurism' in its title despite Loy's handwritten changes to her copy of *Camera Work*. Yet, in *LLB82*, Conover has excerpted quotations and pieces from several of Loy's archived autobiographical manuscripts and unpublished drafts of polemical writings and grouped them together as a list of seventeen aphoristic sound bites about 'modernism'. Like the rest of *LLB82*'s 'Ready Mades', these purpose-built 'Aphorisms on Modernism' are meant to convey Loy as 'modern' to a contemporary audience:

CONSCIOUSNESS originated in the nostalgia of the universe for an audience.

LIVING is projecting reflections of ourselves into the consciousness of our fellows.

THE individual is the inhibition of infinity.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Loy devotes an entire chapter of 'Child' (Chapter 10, 'A Certain Percentage of Women') to a discussion of women's pleasure in sex and the female orgasm. See YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 18.

<sup>126</sup> Loy, 'Aphorisms on Modernism', *LLB82*, pp. 311-313.

<sup>127</sup> Loy, 'Aphorisms on Modernism', *LLB82*, p. 311.

These 'Aphorisms on Modernism' advertise the fluctuating boundaries of textual selves and their narrative consciousness that, in the last few decades, have come to be associated with modernist literature. Ironically, Conover illustrates the cliché of modernist reconstructions of the 'author' by remaking Loy into a 'modernist' writer. Wisely, Conover omitted 'Ready Mades' from *LLB96*. Yet by the mid-1990s the myth of Loy as a 'modern woman' and a reclaimed 'modernist' writer was already settled.

Loy's views on the work of her literary and artistic contemporaries provide a historical context for her own treatment of poetic language. Her essays 'Modern Poetry' (1925), 'Gertrude Stein' (1929), and 'Phenomenon in American Art' (ca. 1949) on the art of Joseph Cornell, contribute to the reader's understanding of Loy's influences. In 'Modern Poetry', Loy praises the linguistic experimentation of poets writing in a new multinational American language. She writes: 'the new poetry of the English language has proceeded out of America' where English has been 'enriched and variegated with the grammatical structure and voice-inflection of many races'.<sup>128</sup> She is echoing Walt Whitman's proto-modern sentiment that 'America is the race of races' and that 'the [American] bard is to be commensurate with a people'.<sup>129</sup> According to Loy's essay, this new musical 'composite language' is best exemplified by E.E. Cummings' 'fresh' free verse rhymes and by the poetry of William Carlos Williams.<sup>130</sup> Of course, Whitman's characterisation of the American poet's innate connection to natural genius and the 'common people' would be realised ultimately by Williams's *Paterson*.<sup>131</sup> Loy's critical analysis of her contemporaries' craft and her evaluation of the advances necessary to poetic language complete Loy's vision a decade earlier of 'the language of

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<sup>128</sup> Loy, 'Modern Poetry', *LLB96*, pp. 157-161.

<sup>129</sup> Walt Whitman, 'Introduction', *Leaves of Grass* (1855), ed. by Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> Loy, 'Modern Poetry', *LLB96*, pp. 159-161.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

the Future'.<sup>132</sup> Her poems in praise of her fellow writers (and friends) James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Nancy Cunard, and Wyndham Lewis offer greater insight into Loy's investment in 'the word made flesh' and the potency of modern poetry than collections of photographs of her with literary luminaries or lists of those in attendance at the salons and exhibitions of twentieth-century bohemia.<sup>133</sup> However, such biographical constellating is necessary; it gives readers and scholars of Loy's work a sense of the ideological climate in which she wrote. Loy chose to associate herself with a select group of her contemporaries by publishing essays that praised the modernity of their work.

In Loy's essay 'Gertrude Stein' (1929) she writes:

Modernism is a prophet crying in the wilderness of stabilized nature that humanity is wasting its aesthetic time. For there is a considerable extension of time between the visits to the picture gallery, the museum, the library. It asks 'what is happening to your aesthetic consciousness during the long long intervals?'

The flux of life is pouring its aesthetic aspect into your eyes, your ears—and you ignore it because you are looking for your canons of beauty in some sort of frame or glass case or tradition. Modernism says: Why not each one of us, scholar or bricklayer, pleasurably realize all that is impressing itself upon our subconscious, the thousand odds and ends which make up your sensory every day life?<sup>134</sup>

Drawing from a kind of aesthetic democracy, Loy exhorts her everyman figure to 'realise' the 'flux of life' while modernism commands him to reclaim the aesthetics of everyday life and appreciate them as one would a piece of art. Her valuation of ephemeral impressions as the modern alternative to traditional art is reminiscent of the Baudelairean distillation of 'the eternal from the transitory'.<sup>135</sup> If, as Baudelaire writes, 'nearly all our originality comes from the stamp that time impresses upon our sensibility', then the imaginative power of the individual becomes a momentary site for

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<sup>132</sup> Loy, 'Aphorisms on Futurism', *LLB96*, p. 152.

<sup>133</sup> This phrase appears in Loy's poem 'Joyce's Ulysses', *LLB96*, pp. 88-90 (p. 89).

<sup>134</sup> Loy, 'Gertrude Stein' (1929), *LLB82*, p. 297.

<sup>135</sup> Baudelaire, p. 402.



art's production.<sup>136</sup> On the surface, Loy's autobiographies violate this principle of simultaneity except when her remembrance of the past is disrupted by an event from 'the long long intervals' of the moment in which she is writing. For instance, Loy's narrative flow is occasionally broken by the self-aware interruption of the writing 'self'; she moves between the moments of childhood and reflection. The interference of the authorial voice with the autobiographical 'self' is not an uncommon feature of autobiography. Loy gives as much importance to consciousness's forward momentum in 1925 as she did in her 1914 'Aphorisms on Futurism'. She vehemently castigates her reader, the unmodern 'You' who must, according to Loy, embrace the everyday sensory experience. 'Modernism says' that the intellectual and the non-intellectual alike must obey its mandate; modernism 'is a prophet' that commands 'humanity' to reclaim its 'aesthetic consciousness'. Loy does not elaborate on the consequences of closing one's ears to modernism's prophetic cry. She writes:

Modernism has democratized the subject matter and *la belle matière* of art; through cubism the newspaper has assumed an aesthetic quality, through Cezanne [sic] a plate has become more than something to put an apple upon, Brancusi has given an evangelistic import to eggs, and Gertrude Stein has given us the Word, in and for itself.

Would not life be lovelier if you were constantly overjoyed by the sublimely pure concavity of your wash bowls? The tubular dynamics of your cigarette?<sup>137</sup>

According to Loy, modernism promises to turn everyday objects, such as a 'plate' or a 'wash bowl', into art—not for the artist's sake but for the common man to enjoy. Loy asserts that anyone can take a mundane object from their surroundings and reinterpret its beauty from an artistic perspective.

In 'Gertrude Stein', Loy does not argue for an experience of the present that excludes the influence of associative memory. In describing the 'achievement' of Stein's 'new literature', she writes: 'like all modern art, this art of Gertrude Stein makes

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<sup>136</sup> Baudelaire, p. 405.

<sup>137</sup> Loy, 'Gertrude Stein', *LLB82*, p. 298.

a demand for a creative audience, by providing a stimulus which [...] leaves us unlimited latitude for personal response'.<sup>138</sup> Stein invites the reader's subconscious associations by foregrounding the associative potential of words within her writing. Loy writes:

In reading Gertrude Stein one is assaulted by a dual army of associated ideas, her associations and your own.

"This is the sun in. This is the lamb of lantern of chalk." Because of the jerk of beauty it contains [sic] shoots the imagination for a fraction of a second through associated memories.

Of sun worship. Lamb worship. Lamb of, light of, the world. (Identical in Christian symbolism.) Shepherd carries lantern. The lantern = lamb's eyes. Chalk white of lamb. Lantern sunshine in chalk pit = absolution of whiteness = pascal lamb = chalk easter toy for peasants.

All this is personal, but something of the kind may happen to anyone when Gertrude Stein leaves Grammatical lacunae among her depictions [...]<sup>139</sup>

The dynamism of modernist writing and modern existence, by nature, 'trips up and falls through into the subconscious source of associated ideas'.<sup>140</sup> Loy suggests that perhaps 'the ideal enigma that the modern would desire to solve is, "what would we know about anything, if we didn't know anything about it?..."to track intellection back to the embryo'.<sup>141</sup> Finally, Loy urges the 'modern' to recreate an embryonic subconscious in which the mind is free to create the new associations she aligns with the modernist writer's aim.

In her essay, Loy's hope for the evolution of man's consciousness and for modern literature glorifies the very elements that she prohibited in 'Aphorisms on Futurism'. Here the past becomes a crucial part of perception. In Loy's autobiographies, she often refers to the pre-socialised child's intellect as the ideal state of human consciousness. Similar to the Romantic idealised child, Loy's nascent consciousness is

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

akin to the pure mental state of genius. Loy suggests that if an adult could retrieve their childhood consciousness through ‘intellection’ then they could liberate themselves from the damaging effects of socialisation. Her ideas evoke a form of auto-analysis on the page—only Loy broadens her own psychological journey by implying that ‘modern’ artists should share the solution to the ‘enigma’ with their reader. Loy promises in the introductory section to ‘Islands’ that she will offer to her audience: ‘A life for a life. My experience to yours for comparison’.<sup>142</sup> At no point in her autobiographies does Loy claim to have ‘solved’ the ‘enigma’ of a retrieved, incipient consciousness or to have uncovered her own prelapsarian mental state.<sup>143</sup> As I show in later chapters, Loy’s anxiety about not being able to trace her own ‘intellection’ to the innocence of infancy is often foregrounded within her narrative. Once the child becomes aware of its own existence, it becomes mortal.

Among Loy’s papers is ‘Chapter XII, Interlude, Being Alive’.<sup>144</sup> It is likely that this chapter was meant to follow the last section of ‘Child’ (‘Chapter XI, The Outraged Womb’).<sup>145</sup> Loy’s titular reference to ‘Being Alive’ as an ‘Interlude’ would suggest that it is a break from her narrative of childhood events and the observations of her parents’ lives in the previous chapters. It also seems likely that this interlude would be followed by either another narrative or a continuation of ‘Child’. However, ‘Being Alive’ also deserves to be read as separate from Loy’s overarching project. On its own, these fifteen typewritten pages outline Loy’s meditations on the phenomena of existence and her thoughts on how it can be portrayed in her writing. ‘Being Alive’ begins:

Being Alive gives us the sensation of using an infinitesimal [sic] amount of an infinite potentiality, of having an incalculable force driving through us into blocked up channels: of being a semi-paralyzed Hercules.

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<sup>142</sup> Loy, ‘Hurry’, from ‘Islands’, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 58, p. 6.

<sup>143</sup> In her autobiographies ‘Child’ and ‘Islands’, Loy likens the child’s socialisation to Man’s Biblical ‘fall’ from innocence.

<sup>144</sup> Loy, ‘Being Alive’, YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 20, pp. 1-15.

<sup>145</sup> For a possible chronology of Loy’s autobiographical writings, see the Appendix.

It gives us the impression of being the witness of our own experience, of witnessing that witness and of witnessing that witnessing, until there is no end to the multiplication of the witnessed witness within us; sentinel of that mysterious reservoir of consciousness where there is no point at which we come to a halt and declare "Here my being conscious *of* begins." Thus we are never entirely taken up by our 'events', there being always something of us left aloof from them.<sup>146</sup>

Coming to a 'halt' to 'declare' the beginning of 'being' is exactly what Loy appears to do at the start of each of her autobiographies. At least this is her attempt—to record the process in which she witnesses an earlier self's existence. Loy's characterisation of autobiography as a bearing of 'witness' suggests that she makes a kind of testimony by telling the 'events' of her life. Loy is distanced from the recounted memories of her 'being' by the infinite limits of her perceived experience. In other words, the older 'self' that watches and the younger 'self' that is being watched are, for Loy, two separate entities. Therefore 'being alive' is 'the stuff of the irrevocable', it is a continual casting off of the 'effigies of our earlier selves'.<sup>147</sup> These past selves do not reflect the 'present self'. Loy argues that the 'present self almost evaporates to merely the future ghost of our past actuality as if once having been defined only in secret may we evolve'.<sup>148</sup> Here her line of reasoning becomes difficult to follow. It seems plausible that Loy is describing the ongoing process of self-definition. One 'self' dissipates as another 'self' emerges with which to identify. 'Being Alive' is vague about how this self-regeneration actually occurs or from where these 'selves' originate. Loy locates the source of one's 'identity' in others' recognition, her own 'presence' is a 'perpetual holding in mind of the mask' by which she is distinguished by her fellow man.<sup>149</sup> Ultimately Loy depicts her own process of 'being alive' as a perpetually unsuccessful attempt at a unified,

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<sup>146</sup> Loy, 'Being Alive', p. 1. Certain irregularities in Loy's typescript are worth noting: 'Hercules' is substituted for 'Colossi' and is handwritten adjacent to her crossed-out original choice. Loy has circled the lines 'It gives us...witness within us'; perhaps at a later stage she wished to remove this section. I have included it, though it is possible that Loy wished to omit it for its obvious Steinian syntax.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

identifiable self. Although in possession of 'infinite potentiality', she is frustrated by not being able to convey that life 'force' and therefore is akin to an impotent 'Hercules'.<sup>150</sup>

Being alive involves trading one mask for the next, and the experience of existence is isolated and detached from the events of one's own life at an 'impersonal distance'.<sup>151</sup>

Loy concludes 'Being Alive':

...we wonder if Life is fleeting and escaped us while we essayed to reason it out,  
or whether Life is static while we absent-mindedly shamble past it.

Being alive is a long time while so little comes within reaching-distance.

But, more than all, being alive is a queer coincidence.<sup>152</sup>

Like 'Aphorisms on Futurism' and her writings on modernism, 'Being Alive' is a meditation on Loy's recreation of a 'self' within her writings. Loy reveals that she is not immune to the image that her text projects back at its author. This anxiety of creating and recreating a self in the present is complicated further by the autobiographical act of amassing 'past selves'. I read 'Being Alive' as Loy's caveat to the reader of her autobiographies. It is Loy's means of stepping outside any likeness we may draw between her narrated self and her authorial voice. One may ask if 'Being Alive' means to invalidate the 'factuality' of the eleven preceding chapters of 'Child'. It would appear that 'Being Alive' relocates Loy in her own self-conscious act of witness and in the performance of a narrative selfhood. By drawing attention to the act of writing, she allows herself to escape the boundaries of her remembered self. Conversely, Loy's closing statement, that 'being alive is a queer coincidence', undermines the believability of her chapter. If life is coincidental, then any conclusions about memory, identity or the evolution of consciousness are also coincidences. Perhaps 'Being Alive' and its accompanying caveat function as another of Loy's masks. Her

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<sup>150</sup> It is interesting that usually Loy associates 'infinite potentiality' with femininity (as in her poem about childbirth, 'Parturition', *LLB96*, pp. 4-8). Yet, here she invokes an emasculated male form of power, a castrated Hercules, to describe the condition of 'being alive'.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

autobiographies should not be mined for the 'biographical truths' of the historical 'Mina Loy's' life. Loy embeds her poetry also with pseudonymous selves. She similarly plays with the verity of her autobiographical selves by revising and occluding them within an ever-modernising fragmentation of identity.

It is worth drawing a comparison between the late writings of Loy and Hilda Doolittle (H.D.). Peter Nicholls compares Loy to Stein and H.D. and argues that the three share 'certain features of decadent writing', in particular 'forms of linguistic opacity' and a 'preoccupation with psychic disunity'.<sup>153</sup> Loy's autobiographical prose occasionally shares in the same verbal play as her poetic language, but generally Loy's prose style is looser. H.D.'s sequence 'Trilogy' (published from 1944 to 1946 in three separate books) combines spiritualism with doubt and faith in eternal values. During the years Loy composed and revised her autobiographies, she wrote increasingly about religion, in particular Christianity. Loy's belief in the healing powers of Christian Science inspired her to write religious treatises that reinterpreted the New Testament from the perspective of the modern 'electric' age.<sup>154</sup> However, H.D. and Loy's dexterity with Christian symbolism alone is not basis enough for their works to be compared. Amid quasi-prophetic sections in H.D.'s 'Trilogy' (that unite wartime London and ancient Egypt in a distillation of time) are moments of self-critical anxiety over the usefulness of art:

Wistfulness, exaltation,  
a pure core of burning cerebration,  
  
jottings on a margin,  
indecipherable palimpsest scribbled over  
  
with too many contradictory emotions,  
search for finite definition

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<sup>153</sup> Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), p. 221.

<sup>154</sup> Loy, 'History of Religion and Eros', YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 159. I elaborate on Loy's religious writings in Chapter 3.

of the infinite, stumbling toward<sup>155</sup>

These lines in poem 'XXXI' from *Trilogy*'s first book, *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), are embedded within a sequence that is as much about the search for God as it is about a failure to comprehend the 'infinite'. An 'old value' eludes her, and a later section, numbered 'XXXVIII', elaborates on the artist's anxiety to arrive 'stumbling' at meaning.

This search for historical parallels,  
research into psychic affinities

has been done to death before,  
will be done again;

no comment can alter spiritual realities  
(you say) or again,

what new light can you possibly  
throw upon them?

my mind (yours)  
your way of thought (mine),

each has its peculiar intricate map,  
threads weave over and under

the jungle-growth  
of biological aptitudes,

inherited tendencies,  
the intellectual effort

of the whole race,  
its tide and ebb;

but my mind (yours)  
has its peculiar ego-centric

personal approach  
to eternal realities,<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), 'XXXI' from *The Walls Do Not Fall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), pp. 36-37 (p. 36).

<sup>156</sup> H.D., pp. 43-44.

I have chosen to include a long excerpt of this poem because so many of H.D.'s ideas in the quotation above reverberate within Loy's autobiographical works. Loy did not directly experience the Second World War; she moved from Europe to New York in 1936.<sup>157</sup> H.D. experienced the bombing of London first-hand. Ideas of racially 'inherited tendencies' and 'personal' or 'spiritual' 'realities' also appear in 'Islands' and 'Goy Israels'. H.D. celebrates the uniqueness of each mind's 'personal approach/ to eternal realities'. Loy's similarly dialogic search for 'historical parallels' between Judeo-Christian mythology and the modern world also admit an anxiety of not being able to 'throw' 'new light' on her subject. She asks what relevance her observations of her own life might have to the lives of her audience. Like H.D., Loy invokes myth as emblematic of an inherent human pattern, one that introduces a distant and unremembered past into the present through prophecy. Loy's autobiographies are inhabited by the fear that her message might offer nothing new to her reader's generation, and that her 'peculiar intricate map' reveals more about her own inherited mental proclivities than it does about any historical 'truth'. Space does not permit as full a discussion of H.D.'s poem sequence as it deserves. Both H.D. and Loy have in common the status of a 'rediscovered' modernist, as well as sharing an association (early on in both their careers) with Pound's critical influence. Burke notes that H.D. wrote to Marianne Moore and asked about Loy early in 1921. According to Burke, Moore replied that Loy was 'beautiful', 'rakish' and 'clever'.<sup>158</sup> In Loy's essay, 'Modern Poetry', she wrote: 'H.D., who is an interesting example of my claims for the American poet who engages with an older culture, has written at least two perfect poems: one about a swan'.<sup>159</sup> Her point in praising H.D.'s engagement with an 'older culture' is that the American poet always brings about newness, even when alluding to

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<sup>157</sup> Burke, p. 387.

<sup>158</sup> Letter from H.D. to Marianne Moore, 11 January 1921, as quoted in Burke p. 292.

<sup>159</sup> Loy, 'Modern Poetry', *LLB96*, p. 160. Loy appears to be referring here to H.D.'s poem 'Leda' (1919).



myth or history, because he or she maintains the ‘acuter shock of the New World consciousness’.<sup>160</sup> Loy’s later writing deserves to be compared to other late modernist works, such as Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, Barnes’s *Ryder* and the later poetry of H.D. Such a comparison might offer useful insights into Loy’s aesthetic response to the realities of war in the modern world.

Reading Loy’s autobiographies in their various revised states gives the impression of her simultaneous fear and desire to complete them. Tyrus Miller interprets Loy’s desire to finish her novel, *Insel*, as reflective of a more general ‘failure’ of modernism to provide anything more than an ‘aesthetic resolution to the crisis of art’.<sup>161</sup> He argues that this malaise, coupled with the historical and economic pressures of the late 1920s and 1930s, is endemic to late modernist writing. At the core of Loy’s revisions and her anxiety about not finishing her autobiographies lurks an obsessive self-sabotage. Not ‘finishing’ becomes an essential part of Loy’s autobiographies, as later chapters will show. If, during the writing of her autobiographies, Loy failed her definitions of the momentum of ‘modern’ creation, then her autobiographies provide an essential focus in Loy’s artistic progression as a modern writer. For Loy being modern is a transition; it is a process rather than a reflection of a historical point in time and it defies any notion of a stable psychological unity.

The following chapters will address each of Loy’s autobiographical manuscripts in relation to their specific historical moment and to the larger ongoing process of her revisions. I will discuss how her narrator’s acts of concealment are often coupled with her confessions of shame. It is possible that Loy’s anxiety about not being wholly modern was part of the experience of modernity, especially for women of the early twentieth century. Loy is recognisably modern when she is reinventing herself, whether

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>161</sup> Tyrus Miller, ‘More or Less Silent: Mina Loy’s Novel *Insel*’, in *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 211.

she does so by smoking a pipe or by publishing aesthetic treatises on the achievements of the modern writer. The extent to which these reinventions take hold depends entirely on their usefulness to Loy at the time. One thing is clear: although the promise of modernity for Loy was a continual psychic rebirth, her actual engagement with the process of becoming modern engages with a past, real or imagined, and expresses the dilemma of being both at once in the present moment and rooted in the influence of memory on perception. In Box 2 of her archived manuscripts a torn, unnumbered page reads:

I have indulged in all the useless inanities but never the profitable delirium of the ambitious. If at least I had been expert in inconsequence I might have married a statesman—but there again—cabinets do not conserve the gestures of Pan because it is impossible to be both cognizant and important—it is probable that I must renounce success.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels: Fragments', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 30.

## Chapter Two

### From Modern to Mystic to Marginal: Loy Criticism from 1918 to the Present

[Mina Loy's] poetry has gradually fostered a community among scholars, but it has also helped to define the sides of a poetry war which is quite real. In recent years her poetry has begun to register with a critical valence for the first time since the 1920s; this is new. But there will always remain those who don't subscribe. She forces us to take sides, and the easiest side to take is the one that looks past her. That is all right, for I believe, finally, that she will establish the reputations of critics more than they will hers, and that a true and good argument about Mina Loy has begun. That argument is needed. There is no version of the twentieth-century canon that includes Mina Loy's work, yet somehow it has survived. Perhaps her absence from such lists is itself a form of status. Perhaps it was her wish to remain unchosen.<sup>163</sup>

Roger L. Conover, from the Introduction to *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996)

Mina Loy has finally been admitted to the 'company of poets', the canon. As if she cared.<sup>164</sup>

Thom Gunn, review of *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996), *The Times Literary Supplement*

Speculation about whether or not Loy would have 'cared' to be part of the canon underlies recent critical attempts to restore her reputation from the margins of literary history. Scholars have used the term 'margin' with increasing frequency since Loy's death in 1966; each time it appears its meaning is blurred by an ever-shifting concept of the canon. Critics restore Loy from a 'margin' that has become increasingly canonical with each re-evaluation of the modernist period. They have also assumed that her work has been excluded by some function of literary history and that, during her lifetime, Loy was central to early twentieth-century literary movements. Over the last forty years, Loy criticism has served a dual purpose: to 'rebuild' her literary reputation and to decry her absence from the modernist canon. Does it matter if she 'cared' to be remembered in the

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<sup>163</sup> Roger L. Conover, 'Introduction', *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy* (New York: Noonday Press, 1996), p. xix. (Hereafter cited as *LLB96*).

<sup>164</sup> Thom Gunn, "'Leper of the Moon': Mina Loy's Tough Epiphanies on the Streets", *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 August 1996, accessed via Times Online <[www.tls.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.tls.timesonline.co.uk)> [accessed 9 August 2007] [p. 6]

annals of poetic history? At times, a mythic figure of Loy seems to loom over critics. Loy's spectre is at once superior to and distrustful of critical judgements made about the value of her work. She wittily rebuffs scholars' attempts to make her important while haunting them with her desire to be heard. Conover quotes a letter written late in her life in which she claims 'I never was a poet', and another to Carl Van Vechten from the beginning of her career that states 'I have a fundamental masculine conceit that ascribes lack of appreciation of my work to want of perspicacity in the observer'.<sup>165</sup> Conover suggests that Loy's 'self-erasing' statements might have been 'part of a conscious design to elude critical framing'.<sup>166</sup> Her real or staged indifference to critical opinions of her work is quoted as Loy's pre-emptive and prophetic defence against her eventual obscurity.

Conover's introduction takes up Loy's defensive method. If readers are repelled by her poetry, it is because her work is 'difficult' and only the most perspicacious of readers (those with 'patience, intelligence, experience, and a dictionary') can read her with profit.<sup>167</sup> He testifies to Loy's apparent divisiveness amongst readers of her poetry and glorifies those who take her 'side' in the 'poetry war'.<sup>168</sup> Gunn's quotation is an example of how critics also glamorise a marginal minority by disavowing the canon. Gunn never met Loy and only began to read her poetry after her critical revival in the 1980s.<sup>169</sup> His assertion that Loy would not have cared to be in 'the company of poets' is inspired by her self-effacing, posthumous image. However, critical attempts to 'restore' Loy's reputation do so with the hope of placing her within the canon, even if the critic disagrees with its formation. Critics who rehabilitate marginal figures reinforce the

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<sup>165</sup> Letter written by Mina Loy in 1914 to Carl Van Vechten, quoted in Roger Conover's 'Introduction' to *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (Highlands, N.C.: The Jargon Society, 1982), pp. xv-xvi. (Hereafter cited as *LLB82*).

<sup>166</sup> Conover, 'Introduction', *LLB96*, p. xiii.

<sup>167</sup> Conover, 'Introduction', *LLB96*, p. xix.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Thom Gunn interview, 8 May 1989, 'An Anglo-American Poet: Interview with Jim Powell', *Shelf Life: Essays, Memoirs and an Interview* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), pp. 218-230 (p. 226). Reprinted from *PN Review* 70 (1989).

centrality of the canon as they discredit it. The margin Loy has occupied since the early 1920s has gradually become a kind of canon, as Conover implies: a counter-canon formed by revisionist scholarship that elevates marginal poets to the peculiar importance of having been excluded, or ‘un-chosen’.

Who is the poet ‘Mina Loy’ that we know today and how has she come into existence? The answer reveals more about trends within literary theory, reading strategies and the proclivities of individual critics than it does about the life of the historical person Mina Loy whom critics wish to restore. One also senses that critics use the word ‘restore’ in order to imply that Loy’s ‘rightful place’ always was alongside the celebrated, canonical modernists. How much should Loy’s supposed attitudes regarding her literary reputation be a concern of Loy criticism? Among scholars, this issue arises from her thirty-year absence from print and public life. Loy is a vivid example of how revisionist theory can have an impact on a writer’s posthumous reputation; the dearth of a critical debate pre-1980 left lone voices—mostly essays and book reviews of her two previous collections, *Lunar Baedeker* [sic] (1923) (hereafter referred to as *LB*) and *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables* (1958) (hereafter referred to as *LBTT*)—to sum up her life and work.

A study of Loy’s critical reception cannot help but implicate itself in what Conover calls the ‘argument about Mina Loy’.<sup>170</sup> An analysis of Loy criticism cannot be written outside the constraints of literary criticism itself, nor can it be immune to the hindsight from which it benefits. Any critic wishing to account for the changing attitudes towards Loy’s work since the 1920s does so within an existing framework of evolving ideologies. One cannot approach Loy’s position within feminist or avant-gardist critical histories without accounting for each scholar’s positionality or for historical shifts within these critical theories. Her revival is never divorced from the

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<sup>170</sup> Conover, ‘Introduction’, *LLB96*, p. xix.

concerns of the age in which she is resurrected. Yet currents recur and expand both within the ideologies of the early twentieth century and within more recent, subsequent critical movements.

An analysis of Loy's critical history must be guided partly by what appears to be the salient events of her writing life. It should also consider the publication dates of her individual poems and the editions of her poetry that have generated the majority of critical responses to her work. However, other landmarks appear which are of equal importance. The 1996 publication of Carolyn Burke's biography, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, is an interesting turning point in attitudes towards Loy's writing. Loy's exhibition at the 1917 Independents Show in New York, her earlier attraction to Futurist ideas in Italy, and her exposure to Gertrude Stein's experiments in language all rank as formative moments in Loy's writing career. In the same year as Burke's biography, Conover's edition of Loy's poetry and essays, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (hereafter referred to as *LLB96*), provided the first widely available text of Loy's writing. Before Burke's biography, the first full-length study of Loy's poetry, *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (1980) by Virginia Kouidis, and a larger, more complete volume of Loy's writing, *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (1982) (hereafter referred to as *LLB82*) marked the beginning of academic Loy scholarship. Before the 1980s, critical writing about Loy from her first appearance in print in 1914 up to roughly 1970 consisted mostly of book reviews, essays and introductory notes by Loy's contemporaries such as William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot. It is important to note that thus far, apart from a few exceptions, Loy scholarship relies on readings of her poetry and rarely mentions her unpublished autobiographies. In a few cases, Loy's manifestos and essays provide structural support to critical readings of her poems as feminist or Futurist-inspired.

This chapter discusses Loy criticism from the year 1918 to the present day. I have divided it thematically into three sub-sections: Loy's early publication in the 'little magazines' of New York and her first two volumes of poetry; *LB* and *LBTT* (1914-1970s); the rise of Loy as an academic subject (1980-1996); and Loy's literary reputation post-biography and the publication of *LLB96* (1996 to the present). By dividing Loy scholarship into these categories I do not mean to imply that any kind of agreement exists between critics during each period, or that in any of the three Loy's image was cohesive. Each period reflects a major change in the availability and accuracy of editions of Loy's writing and her biography, and each time-frame offered the chance to revise previous judgements of Loy's oeuvre.

As I stated in the last chapter, Loy's initial notoriety within the artistic circles of New York's Greenwich Village was largely due to the publication of her erotic poem series 'Love Songs' in 1915. Her heavily sexualised language, combined with a satirical tone, and her use of unpunctuated free verse were seen as an assault on the traditions of the love lyric. Some women, such as the Shakespeare and Company bookshop owner Sylvia Beach, the poet and editor of the Hours Press Nancy Cunard, and the poets Gertrude Stein and Amy Lowell, significantly influenced the development of early twentieth-century literature. Yet, what emerges from an analysis of critical appraisals of women's writing during this time is an anxiety about the woman author herself, who is at once a public and private figure. In the following section, I will discuss how Loy's contemporaries exhibit this anxiety in their critical writing about her work. Early twentieth-century Loy criticism meditates on the separation between the body and the mind of the woman writer. By some of her contemporaries, male and female, she was seen as a sexual revolutionary who wrote about the female body; by others she was considered an intellectual and cerebral writer. Either way this divide, between the body and the mind, stems from the conundrum of the female writer's public status within

circles of male writers. It also arises from a need to evaluate women's work alongside that of their male contemporaries. How did Loy's physical appearance complicate her image as a poet? Space does not allow for a comparison between Loy and Edna St. Vincent Millay, a more formal, rhyming love poet who won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1923, the same year Loy's first collection was published.<sup>171</sup> A comparison of the two would be intriguing on many fronts: both poets were renowned for their physical beauty, both were present in Greenwich Village's literary community in the late 1910s, and both wrote love poetry, though of very different kinds. However, Loy, unlike Millay, made the sexualised female body her subject, and not romance, which opened her up to voyeurism and public censure.

#### 1918-1970: The Public Body

Of all of Loy's first critics, the one whose estimation of her work is most often reiterated is that of the poet and critic Ezra Pound. In his 1918 review of *Others: An Anthology of New Verse* (1917), Pound compares the poems of Loy and her fellow *Others* contributor, Marianne Moore:

In the verse of Marianne Moore I detect traces of emotion; in that of Mina Loy I detect no emotion whatever...These two contributors to the 'Others' anthology write logopoeia. It is, in their case, the utterance of clever people in despair, or hovering upon the brink of that precipice...It is a mind cry, more than a heart cry. 'Take the world if thou wilt but leave me an asylum for my affection' is not their lamentation, but rather 'In the midst of this desolation, give me at least one intelligence to converse with.'

The arid clarity, not without its own beauty, of le tempérament de l'Americaine [sic], is in the poems of these, I think, graduates or post-graduates.<sup>172</sup>

In letters written during this period to the editors and poets Harriet Monroe, Edgar Jepson and William Carlos Williams, Pound emphasizes the uniqueness of Loy's,

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<sup>171</sup> Nancy Milford, 'Introduction', *The Selected Poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, ed. by Nancy Milford (New York: Random House, 2002), p. vi.

<sup>172</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Marianne Moore and Mina Loy', part of "A List of Books, *The Little Review*", March 1918', in *Selected Prose 1909-1965: Ezra Pound*, ed. by William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 394-395. (Hereafter cited as *SP*).



Moore's and Williams' verse and its superiority to that of their contemporaries.<sup>173</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that Pound should choose to group Moore and Loy together for his praise. Before I break down his specific claims about Loy and Moore, it is necessary to situate the term 'logopoeia' within Pound's criticism. His treatise 'How to Read' (1928) includes the most detailed discussion of what he believed were the inner workings of different types of poetic language. In 'How to Read' he divides poetic language into three 'kinds': 'Melopoeia', 'Phanopoeia', and 'Logopoeia'.<sup>174</sup> Simply put, logopoeia is an ironic and playful manipulation of words 'employing [them] not only for their direct meaning' but also accounting for their 'habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word'.<sup>175</sup> Logopoeia, as opposed to the other forms Pound describes, foregrounds meaning through verbal irony and takes advantage of semantics in a 'dance of the intellect among words'.<sup>176</sup> Logopoeia cannot be translated into another language; it depends on an understanding of the local usage of the language in which it appears.

An earlier essay, 'Irony, Laforgue and Some Satire' (1917), appeared in *Poetry* magazine the same year as the *Others* anthology was published.<sup>177</sup> Although Pound first used 'logopoeia' to describe Loy's and Moore's poetry, he used a variation of this idea, 'verbalism', to characterise the poetry of the French poet Jules Laforgue.<sup>178</sup> Pound describes Laforgue's 'verbalism' as ideal for satire because of its subversion of common word usage.<sup>179</sup> A good satirist and verbalist 'writes not the popular language of any country but [in] an international tongue common to the excessively cultivated, and

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<sup>173</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. by D.D. Paige (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), pp. 231-233 (letter to Marianne Moore), pp. 220-221 (letter to William Carlos Williams), pp. 194-195 (letter to Edgar Jepson).

<sup>174</sup> Ezra Pound, 'How to Read' (1928), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), pp. 15-40. (Hereafter cited as *EP*).

<sup>175</sup> Pound, 'How to Read', *EP*, p. 25.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Pound, 'Irony, Laforgue and Some Satire' (1917), *EP*, pp. 280-284 (p. 283).

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

to those more or less familiar with French literature of the first three-fourths of the nineteenth century'.<sup>180</sup> In other words, the kind of linguistic 'dance' to which Pound refers in his critique of Loy is one that is rooted in a particular locality (in this case America) but one that is also international. Besides Loy and Moore, Pound points out only male writers of logopoeia and the style of satire he invokes, such as that of the Earl of Rochester or Laforgue, is that of a highly detached subject.<sup>181</sup> In his *Others* review, Pound suggests that Loy and Moore are, consciously or 'possibly in unconsciousness', 'among the followers of Jules Laforgue'.<sup>182</sup> Logopoeia might have first appeared as a description of Loy's poetics, but ten years after the *Others* review appeared, Pound firmly attributes it to Laforgue, who 'found or refound' it.<sup>183</sup>

Pound's essay about Eliot, which also appeared in *Poetry* in 1917, distinguishes between Pound's ideas of 'intellect' and 'intelligence' in its discussion of Eliot's poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.<sup>184</sup> Praising Eliot as an exemplary 'modern' poet who depicts the 'stuff of our modern world', Pound describes his poetical word-portraits as 'fine' and humanely realistic.<sup>185</sup> The men and women of Eliot's poem in their 'shirt-sleeves' and dresses are not objects of satire, but of sympathy, and they are depicted with a symmetry of form, a neatness that is based on the poem's 'intelligence'.<sup>186</sup> Of the difference between 'intelligence' and 'intellect', Pound writes: 'I have expressly written here not 'intellect' but 'intelligence'.<sup>187</sup> There is no intelligence without emotion. The emotion may be anterior or concurrent.'<sup>188</sup> Pound also describes the logopoeia of Loy's satires as 'a dance of the intelligence', yet in Loy

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Pound, 'Marianne Moore and Mina Loy', *SP*, p. 394.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Pound, 'How to Read', *EP*, p. 33.

<sup>184</sup> Pound, 'T.S. Eliot' (1917), *EP*, pp. 418-422. Reprinted from *Poetry* (1917).

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. p. 420.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., pp. 420-421.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

he finds no 'emotion'. In his *Others* review he writes that Laforgue's 'intelligence' 'ran through the whole gamut of his time' and that Eliot 'has gone on with it'.<sup>189</sup> Robert Browning, however, did not write 'pure logopoeia' because his poetry is 'full of things of the senses'.<sup>190</sup> Pound sets up his genealogy of logopoeia, in its varying states of purity, from Pope to Laforgue and then to Eliot. In his essay on Laforgue, he praises his satire as 'a vehicle for the expression of [Laforgue's] own very personal emotions'.<sup>191</sup> Pound's reluctance to recognise emotion in Loy's poetry ignores what could be read as Loy's own personal investment in her anthologised satirical poems. The 1917 *Others* anthology included three of Loy's poems, 'At the Door of the House', 'The Effectual Marriage', and 'Human Cylinders'.<sup>192</sup> The first two of these are meditations on women's disappointments in love and marriage and are based on Loy's romance with the Italian Futurist Giovanni Papini and her observations of the lives of Italian women. 'At the Door of the House' narrates a tarot card reading. The events of her poem illuminate the precariousness of a woman's role in love: 'A man cut in half/Means deception/And the nude woman/Stands for the world'.<sup>193</sup> Her doomed 'little love-tale' damns her female subject to the threshold of her desire, 'at the door of the house'.<sup>194</sup> 'The Effectual Marriage' is similarly pessimistic about marriage and its ability to fulfil the promises of romantic love.

Gina was a woman  
 Who wanted everything  
 To be everything in woman  
 Everything everyway at once  
 Diurnally variegate  
 Miovanni always knew her  
 She was Gina  
 Gina who lent monogamy

<sup>189</sup> Pound, 'Marianne Moore and Mina Loy, *SP*, p. 394.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Pound, 'Irony, Laforgue, and Some Satire', *EP*, p. 282.

<sup>192</sup> 'The Effectual Marriage' is the shortened title. The poem appeared in *Others: An Anthology of New Verse* as 'The Effectual Marriage or The Insipid Narrative of Gina and Miovanni'. Pound would later anthologize and excerpted version of the poem under the title 'Ineffectual Marriage'.

<sup>193</sup> Mina Loy, 'At the Door of the House', *LLB96*, pp. 33-35 (p. 34).

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

With her fluctuant aspirations<sup>195</sup>

‘Gina’ and ‘Miovanni’ are Loy’s lightly disguised pseudonyms for herself, ‘Mina’, and for ‘Giovanni Papini’. Loy’s intentional distancing of herself from the subjects of her poems probably led Pound to conclude that her poems show no emotion. Those who benefit from a biographical knowledge of her life are more likely to read Loy’s unsympathetic, satirical tone as necessary for her dividing of art from her personal life. The final lines of ‘The Effectual Marriage’ are: ‘(This narrative halted when I learned that the / house which inspired it was the home of a mad / woman. –Forte dei Marmi)’.<sup>196</sup> Pound’s evaluation of these early works as lacking in emotion or emanating from an ironic detached subject reflects Loy’s aim in writing about what are highly personal recollections. It is ironic that while he is correct in singling out Loy’s seemingly unfeeling voice, he fails to recognize or does not mention that a possible reason for Loy’s intellectual dancing is to avoid being implicated in the love-war she narrates.

Which is more real: Loy’s satirical divested tone or her emotionally invested ‘Gina’? Undoubtedly the overt artifice of Loy’s ‘characters’ and her language-play, as in the line ‘Gina had her use    Being useful’, fulfil Pound’s criteria of logopoeia.<sup>197</sup> However, all three of Loy’s *Others* poems contain sensual and, certainly, emotional depictions of femininity. ‘Human Cylinders’ offers the best example of this:

The human cylinders  
Revolving in the enervating dust  
That wraps each closer in the mystery  
Of singularity  
Among the litter of a sunless afternoon<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

Burke interprets this poem as Loy's response to her affair with Papini and her rejection of the Futurist ideal of Man as a machine.<sup>199</sup> She claims, rightly, that loss and isolation are the poem's central themes. The 'intelligence' of this poem, in the Poundian sense, is exhibited by its lament over language's failure to communicate:

Having eaten without tasting  
Talked without communion  
And at least two of us  
Loved a very little  
Without seeking  
To know if our two miseries  
In the lucid rush-together of automatons  
Could form one opulent well-being<sup>200</sup>

Burke contends that Pound 'was sure that "intelligence" was coded "masculine"' and that he 'ignored the fact that [Loy and Moore] were intelligent *women*, whose "logopoeia" was as gender-conscious as his own was gender-blind'.<sup>201</sup> Certainly, we can detect a 'gender-consciousness' in Loy's writing, most obviously in her poetry written before the 1920s. However, it is reductive to read Loy's logopoeia as an attempt to avoid being identified with her female subject. Peter Nicholls' essay, 'Arid clarity: Ezra Pound, Mina Loy, and Jules Laforgue', illuminates certain commonalities between Loy's and Pound's poetics and how they relate to Laforgue's work.<sup>202</sup> He argues that Pound's concept of Laforgue's 'irony' offered Pound a 'necessary escape from sentimentality and romantic expressivism, providing a strategic means by which to affirm the self as strong and authoritative—"modern" as opposed to "decadent" in Pound's scheme of things.'<sup>203</sup> This 'strong', 'authoritative' 'self' is openly expressed in Loy's treatment of her poetic subjects. As I argued in the last chapter, Loy's vision of

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<sup>199</sup> Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 182.

<sup>200</sup> Loy, *LLB96*, p. 40.

<sup>201</sup> Carolyn Burke, 'Mina Loy', in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 230-237 (p. 234). (Hereafter cited as *GoM*).

<sup>202</sup> Peter Nicholls, 'Arid clarity: Ezra Pound, Mina Loy and Jules Laforgue', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 32, (2002), 52-64.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

her own 'modernity' is strongly linked with her ability to impersonate a 'self' within her writing. Often, but not always, she appears to use linguistic devices to camouflage her involvement in the feminine 'lives' of her created personae. Yet, if details of Loy's life can be matched with the 'events' in her poems, they should not impose themselves too strongly on the reader. In other words, we should not assume that Loy's irony is a mask with which she deliberately obscures her 'real' self. The danger of coding Loy's 'intelligence' as solely 'feminine', or 'gender-conscious', is that it undermines her satires' potential to question the supposed fixities of selfhood.

Reading Pound's use of the adjective 'arid' conjures up aesthetic divisions of fluidity verses fixity, hardness verses permeability, fecundity vs. sterility, which are often weighted in masculine and feminine terms. In Pound's essay about Laforgue, he argues that good satire needs 'the form of cutting rhymes to drive it home'.<sup>204</sup> In another essay for *Poetry*, published a few months later, he describes the qualities of 'hardness' and 'softness' in French poetry.<sup>205</sup> His definitions of 'hard' and 'soft' are developed by comparisons between the poetries of the nineteenth-century poets Théophile Gautier and José María de Heredia among others. 'Hardness' is a quality in poetry that is 'always a virtue' and softness is an 'opposite quality which is not always a fault'.<sup>206</sup> 'Hardness' is associated with a kind of virility, or 'intentness', and Pound hints that 'softness' comes from overly sensible, 'muzzy' attempts at being 'poetic'.<sup>207</sup> He writes that 'one tends to conclude that all attempts to be poetic in some manner or other defeat their own end; whereas an intentness on the quality of the emotion to be conveyed

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<sup>204</sup> Pound, 'Irony, Laforgue and Some Satire', *EP*, p. 283.

<sup>205</sup> Pound, 'The Hard and Soft in French Poetry', *EP*, pp. 285-289.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285. Interestingly, Thom Gunn's essay, 'Three Hard Women: H.D., Marianne Moore and Mina Loy', is an example also of the valorisation of the 'hardness' of poetic language. Of course, 'hardness' in terms of difficulty and the stylistic 'hardness' of language and image are all at play in Gunn's essay. Gunn commented on the sexual aspect of Loy's 'hardness' in his interview with *PN Review*: '...Mina Loy adored men, liked sex, she's a very sexual writer in a wonderful way and she's hard, and she's unkind and she's funny. I would love to have met Mina Loy'. See *Shelf Life*, p. 226. Perhaps Gunn is borrowing (or at least influenced by) Pound's description of Loy in the *Others* review of 1917. Gunn appears to reward sexual voracity (of either sex) with the blanket (masculine) quality of 'hardness'.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

makes for poetry'.<sup>208</sup> 'Hard' poetry does not exclude emotion; its conveyance of emotion has a 'certain verity of feeling' that assures it will survive.<sup>209</sup> In a sense, it follows from Pound's connection between Gautier's 'originality' and metaphors of cutting 'in hard stone' that 'hard' poetry is a monument to the poet's uniqueness.<sup>210</sup>

Pound's discussion of 'hardness' and 'softness' in poetry becomes a listing of successful or unsuccessful genealogies; the idea of poetic inheritance and lineage (within French and English poetry) figures strongly into his evaluations of the virile 'hardness' or the 'frigid' softness of poets' styles. Similar material valuations can be found elsewhere in Pound's writing, such as clarity, cleanliness, and hygiene. 'How to Read' uses infection as a metaphor in its advice to new readers of literature: 'It is as important for the purpose of thought to keep language efficient as it is in surgery to keep tetanus bacilli out of one's bandages'.<sup>211</sup> One must 'examine works where language is efficiently used'.<sup>212</sup> The durable hardness and efficiency of modern poetry seeks constant linguistic and stylistic reinvention and refinement, or else it becomes a mere dilution of past forms and movements. Read in the context of Pound's other critical essays, his judgement of Loy's 'arid clarity' is consistent with the hard exactness of 'modern' poetry. Loy's own essay on the subject, which I addressed in the previous chapter, echoes Pound's classification of her poetry as that of an amalgamated American tongue.<sup>213</sup> It is likely that in 1917 Pound would not have been aware that Loy was of British birth and indeed neither Loy's nor Pound's biographies suggest that they had met before she returned to Paris in 1923.<sup>214</sup> It is possible that he knew Loy was not

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., pp. 285-286.

<sup>211</sup> Pound, 'How to Read', *EP*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> See Loy's essay, 'Modern Poetry', *LLB96* on the 'composite language' of America, pp. 157-161 (p. 159).

<sup>214</sup> Burke's biography makes no mention of a first meeting between Pound and Loy. Peter Nicholls has commented on the lack of biographical detail about their friendship, see his aforementioned essay, 'Arid clarity: Ezra Pound, Mina Loy and Jules Laforgue', p. 52.

American and simply meant to make an example of her work as ‘a distinctly national product’ of a racially varied nation without distinct nationalities.<sup>215</sup> In a letter to Margaret Anderson, dated April 10<sup>th</sup> 1918, Pound writes: ‘We must have some American contributions. ???? Mina Loy ?? (On re-reading I find parts of her better than Marianne Moore, though perhaps she sinks further and worser in others.)’. However, judging from the only publicly available recording of Loy’s voice, an interview conducted towards the end of her life, it would have been difficult for anyone who met Loy to mistake her strong British pronunciation for American.<sup>216</sup>

Pound was not the only one of Loy’s contemporaries to draw a comparison between her and Moore. Eliot reviewed the 1917 *Others* anthology for *The Egoist* in 1918, two months after Pound’s article appeared in *The Little Review*.<sup>217</sup> Eliot, writing under the pseudonym ‘T.S. Aptyryx’, praises ‘The Effectual Marriage’ as ‘extremely good’ but faults ‘Human Cylinders’ for being so ‘abstract’ that ‘the word separates from the thing’.<sup>218</sup> Eliot implies that while both Moore and Loy are ‘intellectual’, Moore is ‘not abstract’, her ‘word never parts from the feeling’ and her ‘ideas [...] remain quite personal’.<sup>219</sup> He favours Moore’s ‘fusion of thought and feeling’ and her occasional ‘sentiment’ over Loy’s foregrounding of ideas and words.<sup>220</sup> His conclusion that ‘it is not one or two fortunate hits but the whole body of work that counts’ suggests that he doubts the veracity of Loy’s poetic voice and the breadth of her ability.<sup>221</sup> Unlike Loy’s poetry, the ‘stateliness’ and ‘admirable sense of form’ of Moore’s writing assure him of the completeness of her oeuvre.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Pound, ‘Marianne Moore and Mina Loy, *SP*, pp. 394-395.

<sup>216</sup> Mina Loy, Interviewed by Robert Vas Dias and Paul Blackburn. Aspen, Colorado (August 1965). Archive for New Poetry (#SP L-230), Manville Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCSD.

<sup>217</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Observations’, *The Egoist* (May 1918) 70.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.



In memoirs of their bohemian set, Loy and Moore were often compared in terms of physical beauty, mostly to Moore's disadvantage. William Carlos Williams wrote in his autobiography:

Marianne, with her sidelong laugh and shake of the head, quite child-like and overt, was in awed admiration of Mina's long-legged charms. Such things were in our best tradition. Marianne was our saint—if we had one—in whom we all instinctively felt our purpose came together to form a stream. Everyone loved her.<sup>223</sup>

Even though, or perhaps because, Moore was not considered as beautiful as Loy, Moore symbolizes the innocent hope shared by poets of her circle—at least according to Williams. Williams also famously found himself feeling awkward among the more international moderns such as Duchamp, and so undoubtedly felt sympathy for Moore's 'awed admiration' of Loy's 'charms'. As the embodiment of the poet's hope, Moore is described as a 'stream'. Her fluidity consists of the unity within her of many joint 'purpose[s]'. Her body, like Loy's in the above quotation, stands for a kind of aesthetic, and reflects Williams' feelings about each woman's poems. The neat, shyness of Moore's poetry is attributed to her saintliness and her tenacity, as are her twin red braids and her mousy frame. Moore herself wrote a fascinated critique of Loy's physical 'charms' in her poem 'Those Various Scalpels', which will be discussed in a later section. It is worth noting that this correlation between the body of a female poet and her work is not unique. Among others, Pound bitterly lampooned Amy Lowell for her tremendous size and her editorial prowess. The 'hippopoetess' took over from Pound when he abandoned the Imagist movement in favour of Vorticism.<sup>224</sup>

Reviews of Loy's first collection, *LB*, paint her as both a cerebral and a mystic. The poems Loy chose to include in *LB* were not the early satires on love and romance

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<sup>223</sup> William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: MacGibbon & Kee Ltd., 1968), p. 146.

<sup>224</sup> Letter from Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson, 20 August 1917, *The Letters of Ezra Pound and Margaret Anderson: The Little Review Correspondence*, ed. by Thomas L. Scott and Melvin J. Friedman (New York: New Directions, 1988), pp. 116-118 (p. 116).

on which her poetic reputation was built. In fact she omitted 'The Effectual Marriage', the poem Pound praised for its logopoeia. The poems Loy did include in *LB* were most notably those that reinforced her membership within an elite set of intellectual writers and artists. 'Brancusi's Golden Bird', 'Joyce's Ulysses' and "'The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis'; each connected Loy to the revolutionary experimentation with form with which she most wanted to identify herself. Her poem 'Apology of Genius' defends artistic genius in the face of censorship and refuses to apologize for the offences caused by the 'ostracized' artists of her generation.<sup>225</sup> Those of her early Italian-inspired satires she allowed to be reprinted are censored to create a wholly more intellectual picture. 'Der Blinde Junge' and the collection's title poem, 'Lunar Baedeker', both dwell on a crystallized stasis in consciousness, and evoke a world frozen by death and delirious fancy:

Delirious Avenues  
lit  
with the chandelier souls  
of infusoria  
from Pharaoh's tombstones<sup>226</sup>

( 'Lunar Baedeker' )

Void and extinct  
this planet of the soul  
strains from the craving throat  
in static flight upslanting  
A downy youth's snout  
nozzling the sun  
drowned in dumbfounded instinct<sup>227</sup>

( 'Der Blinde Junge' )

Loy's depictions of a dream-like death ('dumbfounded instinct') combined with her harsh sonic juxtapositions and her dense diction ('static flight upslanting') were both praised and censured. Harriet Monroe, the editor of *Poetry*, reviewed *LB* in 1923. Loy's

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<sup>225</sup> Loy, 'Apology of Genius', *LLB96*, pp. 77-78 (p. 77). I discuss 'Apology of Genius' in Chapter 6.

<sup>226</sup> Loy, 'Lunar Baedeker', *LLB96*, pp. 81-81 (p. 81).

<sup>227</sup> Loy, 'Der Blinde Junge', *LLB96*, pp. 83-84.

poetry had never appeared in *Poetry* and Monroe admitted to not being fond of her writing.<sup>228</sup> Monroe wrote that Loy's 'utterance is a condescension from a spirit too burdened with experience to relax the ironic tension of her grasp' and one which shows a 'modern temperament' as the 'shadowed under-side of the saint's ecstatic sensuality'.<sup>229</sup> The 'modern' saint or mystic that she refers to could have leapt from the pages of Loy's poem 'Lunar Baedeker' itself, and the ecstasy felt by the modern mystic seems by Monroe's definition to be one that is world-weary and distrustful of meaning (hence Loy's invocation of irony). Referring to the mystic tradition, she implies that Loy's poetic revelations are experienced through the body, which acts as a kind of conduit to a divine knowledge or love. However, the 'modern' saint cannot rely on a clear communication with the spirit; her 'ironic' 'grasp' prevents ascension and roots her pitifully in the mortal, 'shadowed' sainthood of toiling and living. Monroe's contention with Loy's poetry is based on her impression of Loy's insincerity: that the poet's 'spirit' will not release its 'grasp' on the material presented. In a 1916 issue of *Others* devoted entirely to women poets its editor, the American poet Helen Hoyt, writes:

At present most of what we know, or think we know, of women has been found out by men. We have yet to hear what woman will tell of herself, and where can she tell it more intimately, more immediately, than in poetry? If only she is able to be sincere enough; and rather brave!<sup>230</sup>

Subsequently, Hoyt's introduction suggests that, through poetry, women are capable of responding to the concept of 'Woman' created by male authors and to sexual and psychoanalytic ideas (such as those of Havelock Ellis) emerging at the time. According to the quotation above, that 'telling' must be both 'intimate' (bodily) and 'immediate'

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<sup>228</sup> There is no record that Loy ever submitted to *Poetry*, and she was excluded (as was Moore) from *The New Poetry* (1917), an anthology edited by Harriet Monroe.

<sup>229</sup> Harriet Monroe, 'Guide to the Moon', *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (October-March 1923-1924) 100-103.

<sup>230</sup> Helen Hoyt, 'Retort', *Others* 3.3 (September 1916) 54. This issue included poems by H.D., Harriet Monroe, and Constance Lady Skinner and 15 other women.

(uncensored by the mind). Such a task certainly requires bravery, as Hoyt suggests; she alludes to the problematic of personal revelation in poetry for the female poet. Moore and Loy are both absent from this issue, though it has been falsely claimed that the poet 'Muna Lee' is a pseudonym for Loy herself.<sup>231</sup> A cursory reading of the poem disproves this suggestion, as does the existence of the actual historical poet Muna Lee. It would be difficult to imagine Loy writing the linguistically simple, trite lines: 'You love/As the wind loves a bed of blue larkspur, /But I/As a yellow poppy/Loves starlight in the pool'.<sup>232</sup>

Edwin Muir's review of *LB* comments on Loy's tendency to intellectualize: 'Where Mrs. Loy is good she is not cerebral, and where she is cerebral she is not at all good'.<sup>233</sup> Muir thought that Loy was 'a mystic of a very peculiar kind, a negative mystic, the chief fruit of whose mysticism is an acridly intimate awareness of the flesh', and that her mysticism was complemented by her sense of the obscene.<sup>234</sup> Here the critic takes full advantage of a lurid comparison between early Christian mystics and Loy. He implies that instead of using the body as a conduit for metaphysical knowledge or religious experience, Loy remains connected to a fleshly knowledge and does not transcend the body. She is in fact a mystic in reverse, who is bound to the divinity of her body rather than to an abstract god.

After the publication of *LB*, Loy published less and less in New York's 'little magazines'. In 1921, she left the United States for Europe. Preoccupied with rising political tensions in France and Germany, and engrossed in her Paris lampshade

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<sup>231</sup> Hilda Bronstein, 'Mina Loy and the Problematic of Gender for Women Poets of the Avant-Garde' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of London, 2002), p. 9. For details on the life and writing of Muna Lee, see *A Pan-American Life: Selected Poetry and Prose of Muna Lee*, ed. by Jonathan Cohen (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004). Muna Lee's first and only poetry collection, *Sea-Change*, was published in 1923, the same year as Loy published her first collection, *Lunar Baedeker* (Contact Editions).

<sup>232</sup> Muna Lee, 'Not You', *Others* 3.3 (September 1916) 64-65 (p. 64). Lee's *Sea-Change* did not include this poem.

<sup>233</sup> Edwin Muir, 'Readers and Writers', *The New Age* (January 1924), pp. 164-165.

<sup>234</sup> Muir is borrowing possibly from Pound; the words 'acrid' and 'arid' share similar sounds.

business, Loy wrote very few poems and published even fewer till 1958, after she had returned to live in New York. Prompted by Kenneth Rexroth's 1944 tribute in *Circle* magazine, the lobbying began to get Loy back into print; in 1958 *LBTT* was published. Loy's relative silence between 1923 and 1958 had a surprising impact on those who would rediscover her and push for her work to be reissued. On the inside cover of *LBTT*, Rexroth is described as the 'redoubtable spokesman for two generations of the American avant-garde' who 'deserves much credit for the rediscovery of Mina Loy's work'.<sup>235</sup> Rexroth's praise in his 1944 tribute is dubious at best. He begins with a matter-of-fact statement of Loy's faults, which amount to: an 'inferior[ity] in technical mastery', her 'turns of phrase [which] can only be accounted for as lapses of skill', and her 'wilful and skittish' 'obscurity'.<sup>236</sup> Drawing on Pound's initial comparison of Loy with Moore, Rexroth admits a certain similarity between the two poets, but ultimately denounces Moore's 'dehydrated levity' in favour of Loy's more 'earnest' material.<sup>237</sup> As Rexroth's comparative analysis proceeds, it becomes clear that Moore and Loy inhabit opposite sides of the same coin—that is, female experience: Loy writes about 'sexual satisfaction', 'marriage, procreation; sterility, disorder, disaster, [and] death' while Moore is 'interested in establishing public privilege for a special and peculiarly impoverished sensibility', namely that of a 'dehydrated' spinster.<sup>238</sup> The de-sexualization of Moore's work and body is contrasted with Loy's fluid and fecund sexuality, so much so that reading Loy produces a bodily response in the reader. According to Rexroth, when 'one reads of Mina Loy's babies' (presumably referring to her poem about childbirth, 'Parturition') 'one's sphincters loosen'. He concludes his

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<sup>235</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, 'Les Lauriers Sont Coupés', *Circle*, 1.4, (1944), pp. 69-70. Reprinted in *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables*, ed. by Jonathan Williams (Highlands, N.C.: Jargon Society, 1958), unnumbered pages.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Once again, Pound's adjective 'arid' reappears in the word 'dehydrated'.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

comparison of Loy and Moore by writing that 'Mina Loy, in her best known work, dipped her pen in the glands of Bartholin, and wrote'.<sup>239</sup>

Presumably, 'Loy's best known work' refers to 'Love Songs', the controversial erotic poem sequence published first as a shorter version in 1915, and subsequently in an issue of *Others* entirely devoted to the whole series. These are the very poems that Loy chose to excise almost entirely from her first volume, *LB*. Where Muir and Monroe witnessed in Loy's writing a spiritual hunger retained and experienced in the flesh, Rexroth senses a 'forthright' and 'tough' voice devoid of sentimentality.<sup>240</sup> It does not appear that these critics, writing twenty years apart, see Loy's writing all that differently. Rather, Rexroth's appreciation of Loy's irony and erotic directness is a result of a changing attitude towards women's bodily experiences of pleasure and displeasure as valid poetic subjects. He does not express a need to 'intellectualize' Loy's writing about the body; in fact such claims of learned rhetoric are lampooned by Rexroth in his descriptions of the 'Poetry Renaissance' as a time 'when people thought Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot learned'.<sup>241</sup>

Although many have commented on the alleged rivalry between Marianne Moore and Mina Loy it is important to remember that Moore's placement within the canon has always been more stable than Loy's. Moore is more often included in anthologies (only one test) of modernist or twentieth-century poetry and is more often the subject of academic debate alongside her male peers, Pound, Eliot and Williams.<sup>242</sup> In 1935, Eliot introduced Faber and Faber's publication of Moore's *Selected Poems*.

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (second edition edited by Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair) includes Marianne Moore but not Loy. It covers English language poets from Walt Whitman (b. 1819) to Cathy Song (b. 1955). The introduction states: 'Some poets of less prominence were to outlast some others who at first achieved greater reputations.' It eventually claims that the poets who 'survived' from the early twentieth century were 'Stevens, Cummings, Williams, Frost, Eliot, Pound and Moore'. See pp. 8-10.

More recently, in her introduction to *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Women's Poetry*, the editor and poet Fleur Adcock compares Loy to Moore:

Mina Loy, a pioneer of international Modernism, was praised by Eliot and Pound, but these and her more recent advocates have failed to persuade me that her 'poetry of ideas and wordplay' retains much more than curiosity value; her impulse to experiment was admirable in itself, but the results now look almost as quaint and over written as [Vita] Sackville-West's Miltonic or Virgilian imitations.

Other experiments have been more successful and more durable. Marianne Moore stands out as genuinely original, not only by reason of her technical innovations (the syllabic lines, the idiosyncratically shaped stanzas, the use of appliquéed [sic] prose quotations) but in the way she compels apparently intractable material, jagged with scientific terms and abstruse locutions, into elegant, witty statements. Her style is her own: unlike Loy, who was influenced by Laforgue and a bundle of others, she developed it by herself.<sup>243</sup>

I have quoted Adcock's introduction at length because it raises many interrelated points on which Loy's and Moore's critics have commented. Adcock, a New Zealand-born poet residing in England, claims that Moore's 'technical innovations', her 'elegant' and 'witty' reformulations of scientific fact (she trained as a biologist) prove that she has a 'genuinely original' style.<sup>244</sup> However, Loy's stanzas are also 'idiosyncratically shaped' and Adcock's labelling of Moore's 'syllabic lines' as innovative is anachronistic and untrue of the early twentieth century. It is similarly difficult to imagine that Adcock makes a fair comparison between Loy's writing and Sackville-West's highly formal, allusive poems:

Night came again to heal my daily scars;  
Shreds of myself returned again to me;  
Shreds of myself, that others took and wove  
Into themselves, till I had ceased to be.  
Poor patchwork of myself was all unripped  
And stitched again into some harmony  
Like the pure purpose of an orchestra.  
I rode my horse across a moonlit cove  
And found therein my chained Andromeda.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Fleur Adcock, 'Introduction', *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Women's Poetry*, ed. by Fleur Adcock (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp. 7-8.

<sup>244</sup> Adcock, p. 8.

<sup>245</sup> V. Sackville-West, *Solitude: A Poem* (London: Hogarth Press, 1938), pp. 5-56 (p. 17).

The metric regularity of Sackville-West's lines, her use of end-rhyme and simple diction proves Adcock's comparison between Loy and Sackville-West to be unfounded and undeserved. The two poets have only their British nationality and their sexual rebelliousness in common. Rightly, Adcock argues on behalf of 'rehabilitated' female poets that 'it would be wrong to adopt the conspiracy theory and suggest that wholesale repression of women's poetry has taken place in this century. Marianne Moore, for example, was treated with respect from quite an early stage in her career, when she was recognised by Pound and Eliot'.<sup>246</sup> While it does seem that, as Adcock writes, 'it would be wrong to adopt [a] conspiracy theory' about the 'wholesale repression of women's poetry' in the twentieth century, an examination of Pound's correspondence with Moore does testify to a certain anxiety about women's writing.<sup>247</sup> In a letter to Moore written in December 1918, Pound responds to poems she submitted to *The Little Review*. He provides her with several suggestions and criticisms and inquires about her influences: 'How much of your verse *is* European?'.<sup>248</sup> He also inquires about her age, her race (if she is 'a jet black Ethiopian Othello-hued') and if she has a 'book of verse in print'.<sup>249</sup> His next letter, written presumably in response to the personal details Moore provided, is written in 'doggerel' verse:

The female is chaos ,  
  
the male  
  
is a fixed point of stupidity, but only the female  
can content itself with prolonged conversation  
with but one sole other creature of its own sex and  
of its own unavoidable specie  
  
[...]

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<sup>246</sup> Adcock, p. 3.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Letter from Ezra Pound to Marianne Moore, 16 December 1918, in *GoM*, pp. 359-362 (p. 360).

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.



You , my dear correspondent ,  
are a stabilized female ,  
I am a male who has attained the chaotic fluidities ,<sup>250</sup>

Presumably, the ‘prolonged conversation’ with another ‘female’ refers to Moore’s cohabitation with her mother until her mother’s death.<sup>251</sup> For Pound, Moore seems to have reversed the usual roles of chaotic female and fixed male. She is ‘stabilized’ and he is the typically female ‘chaotic fluidit[y]’. He contemplates also whether or not he could have risen to the challenge of corresponding with Moore had she been an ‘Ethiopian’.<sup>252</sup> Clearly, Moore represents otherness and is possibly more threatening to Pound because of her supposed stability. As an intelligent, chaste and isolated correspondent, Moore was a threat to Pound because he could not place her in a particular circle of influence. Her inaccessibility to Pound makes him ‘chaotic’, which is displayed by his letter’s logorrhoea. Perhaps Pound’s effusiveness is meant to intimidate Moore. Either way, Pound’s letters betray an anxiety about overlaps in the public and private spheres inhabited by female authors. His championing of Moore’s work and his ‘legitimate curiosity’ about her influences reflect the exclusionary and inclusive principles of editorship.<sup>253</sup> One has only to read Adcock’s poem ‘The Pangolin’ alongside Moore’s poem of the same title and subject to see how anthologists re-order literary history based on their own personal influences and preferences.<sup>254</sup>

It has been argued that Moore’s poem, ‘Those Various Scalpels’, was written about Loy.<sup>255</sup> The first half of the poem lists the physical attributes of her subject, ‘your hair, the tails of two/ fighting-cocks head to head in stone—’, ‘your eyes, flowers of ice

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<sup>250</sup> Letter from Ezra Pound to Marianne Moore, 1 February 1919, in *GoM*, pp. 362-365 (pp. 362-363).

<sup>251</sup> Marilyn L. Brownstein, ‘Marianne Moore’, in *GoM*, pp. 323-334 (p. 323).

<sup>252</sup> Letter from Pound to Moore, 1 February 1919, in *GoM*, p. 363.

<sup>253</sup> Letter from Pound to Moore, 16 December 1918, in *GoM*, p. 360.

<sup>254</sup> Fleur Adcock, ‘The Pangolin’, *Fleur Adcock: Poems 1960-2000* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), p. 32.

<sup>255</sup> Conover, ‘Introduction’, *LLB96*, p. xiv. Conover credits the source of this interpretation to the Marianne Moore scholar Patricia C. Willis. Willis is also curator of the Mina Loy Papers and the Yale Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

and snow', and 'your cheeks, those rosettes/ of blood on the stone floors of French chateaux'.<sup>256</sup> Each characteristic is in some way unnatural; it is as if the signs of her origin, 'Florentine goldwork' and stone French floors obscure the nature of the subject rather than revealing it.<sup>257</sup> This picture of Loy is a disguise, and her raiment is a 'collection of little objects' meant to distract or destroy: 'Are they weapons or scalpels?'.<sup>258</sup> In Moore's poem, Loy's physical beauty and clothing are akin to the 'rich instruments with which [she] experiment[s]' and 'dissect[s] destiny'.<sup>259</sup> Moore's final question is: 'But why dissect destiny with instruments more highly specialized than components of destiny itself?'.<sup>260</sup> Possibly Moore's critique is directed towards Loy's use of dense and harsh sounds and she means to attack Loy's Futurist (and indeed cubist) use of collage technique within her poetry to distort conventional narrative meaning. It is significant that the poet's body and the poet's technique are so closely linked, and that Moore's ultimate critique is that whether 'scalpels' or 'weapons', the dissecting of 'destiny' or in fact 'reality' may be alluring, but either way you destroy the thing itself. The lines:

your eyes, flowers of ice and snow  
sown by tearing winds on the cordage of disabled ships; your raised hand,  
an ambiguous signature [...]<sup>261</sup>

allude to the 'destiny' that Moore believes Loy attempts to dissect. The doubled coldness of Loy's eyes, 'flowers of ice and snow', hangs like ragged sails from 'disabled ships'. In his autobiography, Williams recalled that Moore read 'Those Various Scalpels' at one of Lola Ridge's artist gatherings in 1921, but he makes no

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<sup>256</sup> Marianne Moore, 'Those Various Scalpels', *Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 51-52 (p. 51).

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

comment on the poem's possible subject.<sup>262</sup> By that year, Moore and the rest of their circle would have known about the disappearance of Loy's husband, Arthur Cravan, at sea. By invoking this detail about Cravan's tragic death in 'disabled ships', Moore connects Loy's outer physical hardness and coldness with her widowhood. Possibly her 'ambiguous signature' is the false disguise of 'Mrs. Arthur Cravan' (a name Loy used). Is Loy implicated in the death of her husband or is she performing the post-mortem on his destiny? Either way she is portrayed as a *femme fatale*, and contact with her body, and her poetry, is lethal. In an essay published in 1926 entitled "'New" Poetry Since 1912', Moore recalls Loy's contributions to *Others* as 'a sliced, cylindrical, complicated yet simple use of words'.<sup>263</sup>

Loy's literary reputation has been hampered by a fixation on her physical presence; she has not escaped being equated with the subject of her poetry and with the public image she herself maintained. The publication of *LBTT* offered several new things. To *LB*'s selection of Loy's early work, it added poetry written after 1923; and most significantly, the 1958 text included selections from her verse-autobiography, 'Anglo-Mongrels and The Rose'. The inclusion of 'Time-Table', an outline of Loy's life, marks the beginning of a trend that extends into later subsequent volumes: the appending of biographical detail.<sup>264</sup> The editor of *LBTT*, Jonathan Williams, asked W.C. Williams to contribute an introductory note attesting to Loy's significance and the importance of this new volume of her work. W.C. Williams writes that Loy's work is 'a record of a beautiful woman who has fearlessly taken her part in a disturbing period of the life about her'.<sup>265</sup> Loy's beauty and her 'intelligence' in the face of a 'shoddy world' is the resilience of a forgotten age, according to W.C. Williams, for 'she did not

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<sup>262</sup> Williams, *Autobiography*, p. 171.

<sup>263</sup> Marianne Moore, "'New" Poetry Since 1912' (1926), *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore* ed. by Patricia C. Willis (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 121.

<sup>264</sup> Conover, 'Time-Table', *LLB82*, pp. lxiii-lxxix.

<sup>265</sup> William Carlos Williams, 'Mina Loy', *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables*, ed. by Jonathan Williams (Highlands, N.C.: Jargon Society, 1958), 1 of 3 unnumbered pages. (Hereafter cited as *LBTT*).

complain. She did not turn bitter. She did not give up her life to weeping'.<sup>266</sup> Even though Williams spends a fair amount of his introductory note describing the textual features of Loy's poetry, the simultaneous image he evokes of a 'tough' yet 'beautiful' woman whose life provided her with tragic subject matter still endures several decades later.

When W.C. Williams was asked by Jonathan Williams to introduce readers to Loy's poetry in 1958, thirty years after Loy and W.C. Williams had fallen out of touch, he was daunted by the task. In a letter to his friend, the poet Denise Levertov, W.C. Williams writes: 'Mina Loy's Lunar Baedeker looks strange lying on my desk—I haven't had time to read it over, to reacquaint myself with it...[writing an introduction] will take some doing on my part. Wish me luck.'<sup>267</sup> The ageing poet complains about his slow reading and typing skills, but concludes valiantly: 'It'll be done'.<sup>268</sup> According to W.C. Williams' autobiography, he had a great affection for Loy as a person, and as a fellow poet, he admired her writing. However, judging from the language of his letter to Levertov, it seems that a sense of duty directed him to the task. Jonathan Williams elicited written introductions from both W.C. Williams and Levertov and chose to reprint Rexroth's 1944 *Circle* tribute as a forward to Loy's poems. Those texts together with back-page laudatory quotations from Henry Miller, Edward Dahlberg, the poet Louis Zukofsky and Walter Lowenfels, attest to a kind of anticipatory myth-building that was in progress even before Loy's death. Two of these quotations hint at the revisionist process at place in *LBTT*. Dahlberg writes, 'In a day when rubbish is being canonized it is an immense delight to hear that Mina Loy's poems are to find sanctuary at last in a book. H.D., Mina Loy, Mary Butts, Marsden Hartley, Emanuel Carnevali

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> William Carlos Williams letter to Denise Levertov, 12 February 1958, in *The Letters of Denise Levertov and William Carlos Williams*, ed. by Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1998), pp. 75-80.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

and F.S. Flint were my tutelary Muses and woodland Seers'.<sup>269</sup> Dahlberg's use of the term 'sanctuary' suggests that *LBTT* served a dual purpose: to provide refuge to Loy's poetic legacy and to stand as a monument to her influence over the next generation of poets. His description of Loy as a 'muse' and as a 'woodland Seer' strangely removes her from any historical narrative of poetry and argues for the timelessness of her poetic voice. Muses and seers are also removed from literary tradition and questions of canon formation; their visions are outside of influence, they are in fact influence in and of themselves. Dahlberg's words decry a canon formed without Loy yet also argue for her secured presence as a source of inspiration outside it. Zukofsky's testimonial supports this: 'Mina Loy heard of last in the 1920s remains a poet more than thirty years later—which is the test of a poet'.<sup>270</sup> Zukofsky acknowledges that the power and originality of her work still stand up under a more contemporary scrutiny, and that thirty years later perhaps little supersedes the quality of her work.

Jonathan Williams' choices are more than just an attempt to create a poetic inheritance or an argument for Loy's contributions to poetic history. These notes intend to offer a revised view of the modernist picture that had begun to congeal in the years after modernisms decline. Beyond that, the legacy that Williams creates is one that a new generation of poets, those coming to Loy perhaps for the first time, are meant to continue. Possibly the choice of W.C. Williams, and not Pound or Eliot, reflects the different reputations each of those poets had in the years after many of the little magazines in which they were involved had folded. I will return later to a discussion of Williams' centrality in a 'revised' American modernism and the effects of that revisionist movement on both Loy and Williams. In Dahlberg's list of undervalued authors, it is worth noting that male 'lost' authors appear alongside female ones: it does not underline an especially suppressed female element in the modernist canon. The rise

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<sup>269</sup> Edward Dahlberg, quotation on back book jacket, *LBTT*.

<sup>270</sup> Louis Zukofsky, quotation on back book jacket, *LBTT*.

of Loy scholarship that began in the 1970s would create a (now ubiquitous) grouping together of exclusively female names among those who occupied the margin of modernist literary history.

#### 1970-1996: The Feminist Body

In *Women of the Left Bank* (1986), a history of early twentieth-century Paris avant-garde women's writing, Shari Benstock offers an analysis of Loy's publishing history in a section titled 'The Case of Mina Loy'.<sup>271</sup> She questions Loy's changing status from representative of the many 'isms' of the early twentieth century to a largely forgotten, marginal figure. Benstock's essay precedes the more recent revival of interest in Loy's writing and Burke's biography. For this reason, her study is a useful gauge of how Mina Loy fitted into an earlier conception of a 'mythic' Paris literary bohemia. Her discussion is largely biographical and attempts to explain the marginality of Loy's female contemporaries through Loy's own personal and publishing circumstances. Benstock compares Loy's written portrayal of women's experiences to Virginia Woolf's novels. She claims that like Woolf's writing, 'the combination of a feminist subject matter and technical experimentation [in Loy's writing] may have proved fatal to [her] efforts to find a receptive reading audience'.<sup>272</sup> A comparison between Loy and Woolf in this context is problematic for many reasons. Although the two were exact contemporaries, they both had separate circles of influence. Through the Hogarth Press Woolf published Stein and Eliot, but this appears to be the extent of her connections to the Paris avant-garde community of which Loy was a part. Further differences between Loy and Woolf include class, family, maternity and marital status, all of which had an impact on both women's writing lives.

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<sup>271</sup> Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 381-389.

<sup>272</sup> Benstock, p. 387.

In *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* (1988,1997)

Rachel Bowlby writes about the paradoxical use of Woolf as an 'exemplary' figure within feminist criticism of women's writing:

Woolf is the only twentieth-century British woman writer who is taken seriously by critics of all casts. Whether she is seen to fit in with or to subvert what the critic identifies as established literary standards, and depending on whether subversion or conformity is the criterion of value, Woolf is vehemently celebrated or denounced from all sides. Among feminist critics who approve her work, she is seen as exemplary both in the sense of exceptional—a *unique* heroine, a foremother, a figurehead—and as an example, in some way representative or typical of something called 'women's writing'.<sup>273</sup>

Benstock's treatment of Loy's publishing history as an example of how women's writing from that era has consistently been ignored limits our understanding or will to interrogate Loy's marginality further. The implication of uniform patriarchal censorship as well as the comparison between Loy and Woolf means to exalt the former as an exceptional heroic figure by equating their 'canonical' value (in fact Woolf has become the chief figure representing women's writing). Referring to biography's involvement in the process of shaping an author's exemplarity, Bowlby argues:

In her oddness or in her representativeness, Virginia Woolf is always treated as a 'case'. For her advocates, either the extraordinary nature of Woolf's life is what makes her distinctive, or its typicality is what makes her writing a woman's. For her detractors, Woolf's peculiarities mar her work and disqualify her from writing as a woman, or else her all too normal experiences confine her work within 'womanly' limits which cannot achieve the status of art.<sup>274</sup>

The treatment of Woolf as a 'case' has interesting repercussions as do the allegiances developed in relation to differing interpretations of Woolf's life. The word 'case' also shows up in Benstock's title: 'Publishing Histories: The Case of Mina Loy'.<sup>275</sup> Yet, what does 'case' imply? Bowlby highlights its application to Woolf's exemplarity, as well as to the 'personal legend' about the extremes of her mental illness and sexual

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<sup>273</sup> Rachel Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1997), p. 12.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>275</sup> Benstock, p. 381.

history. In Woolf's 'case', the woman becomes her writing (that is the physical act of writing her illness and sexuality), as well as the pathology itself in terms of a 'case' history. She comes to embody the disease she has become an example of, and fittingly, becomes the guideline for further diagnoses. Virginia Woolf is indivisible from her textual manifestations of this disease; the text becomes both her and her 'case'. And here again, is another interesting implication of the term. To make a 'case' in a judicial sense is to provide a defense, apology, or explanation for events—usually criminal, always outside the expected norms of behaviour. If Woolf's texts, as a result of the public knowledge of her controversial life through biography, come to be read as a 'case' in the sense of legality then they are always explaining, always defending and so attempting to get back into the acceptable borders of society, propriety and indeed innocence. If Woolf herself is not making this case (or read to be providing her own defence) then it falls to feminist scholarship to make its case by critically and historically re-creating the 'crime scene' of her marginalization and providing 'character evidence' for her rightful status as a heroine of British women's writing. Making a 'case' for Loy to be remembered is similarly troubling; it is difficult to argue *from the margins against the margins* without admitting the pathology of how Loy might have arrived there. In part, critical attempts to treat Loy's case of 'marginality' inherently confirm her position.

Virginia Kouidis's *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (1980), the first book-length analysis of Loy's poetry, was based on Kouidis's doctoral thesis completed at the University of Iowa in 1972, *The Cerebral Forager: An Introduction to the Poetry of Mina Loy*. The primacy of Kouidis's book, as both the first and the most detailed analysis of Loy, has lead subsequent Loy critics to grapple with the issues most central to the benchmark set by Kouidis's study. This is not to say that Loy critics have always read Kouidis's work favourably. Scholarship since 1980 has questioned Kouidis's



cohesive image of Loy writing to express ‘the female self’.<sup>276</sup> Kouidis develops her argument through Loy’s lines in the poem ‘O Hell’ written in 1920, ‘Our person is a covered entrance to infinity/ Choked with the tatters of tradition’:

In most of [Loy’s] early poetry she analyzes the female self as she sees its universal situation mirrored in her own life and the lives of her contemporaries...she finds the divine fulfilment of the self obstructed by the laws and purposes of the universe—incomprehensible to the self but nevertheless shaping and limiting its perception, by its own flight from freedom, and, in the case of women, by repressive sexual mores.<sup>277</sup>

She reads the ‘covered entrance’ as symbolic of women’s sexual repression and imagines that Loy’s ‘infinity’ of the self is ‘orgasmic self-realization’.<sup>278</sup> Kouidis generalises about the ‘universal situation’ of women’s repression and believes that Loy sympathised with her fellow victims of ‘repressive sexual mores’.<sup>279</sup> As evidence of Loy’s sympathy, she quotes from letters written in 1915 to her friend and early literary agent Carl Van Vechten: ‘I believe we’ll get more ‘wholesome sex’ in American art—than in English after all—though you *are* considered so suburban—but that is to be expected—we haven’t had a Whitman’.<sup>280</sup> Yet Loy’s call for a Whitmanesque expression of the sexual body in verse does not specify an end to a clearly male or female sexual repression. Instead what preoccupies Loy here is a question of national and cultural receptivity to the depiction of sex and desire. Kouidis turns to Loy’s early poetry for further support, such as her two poem sequences ‘Love Songs’ (1915, 1917) and ‘Italian Pictures’ (1914) and the poem ‘Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots’ (1914). The subjects of both ‘Italian Pictures’ and ‘Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots’ are indeed, as Kouidis argues, Loy’s observations of the cloistered lives of Florentine

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<sup>276</sup> See Virginia Kouidis’s first chapter entitled ‘The Female Self’, *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), pp. 26-48. (Hereafter cited as *AMP*).

<sup>277</sup> Kouidis, *AMP*, p. 26.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

women.<sup>281</sup> Yet lines like ‘The hips of women sway/ Among the crawling children they produce’ and ‘Wanton Italian matrons/ Discuss the better business of bed-linen’ reveal an animal quality from which these women are never given leave in the poem.<sup>282</sup>

‘Virgins Plus Curtains’ is slightly more sympathetic to the inner lives of her subjects. Loy uses the pronoun ‘we’ but only temporarily aligns herself with the ‘universal situation’ of women whose economic survival depends on marriage. Her sympathy enters into the poem intermittently, most significantly in the lines ‘We have been taught/ Love is a god/ White with soft wings’.<sup>283</sup> By the end of the poem the subject ‘we’ drops out entirely and is replaced by the more universal, voiceless ‘virgins’. Clearly, the women depicted in Loy’s early poems of the ‘female self’ are not her ‘contemporaries’, as Kouidis argues, but subjects detached from the ‘self’ Loy would portray in other works. It also seems strange that Kouidis’s ‘self’ is ‘obstructed’, shaped and limited ‘by the laws and purposes of the universe’ yet does not comprehend this process.<sup>284</sup> If that is so, then Loy’s poetry contradicts Kouidis’s model; the ‘self’ is knowledgeable of such obstructive laws, and more to the point, this knowledge is exhibited best in Loy’s satirical writing. These are the only moments in Loy’s early poetry where she identifies with Futurism’s image of an animalized, contaminated female body, as found in the Futurist Manifesto: ‘Oh! Maternal ditch, almost full of muddy water! Fair factory drain! I gulped down your nourishing sludge; and I remembered the blessed black breast of my Sudanese nurse...’<sup>285</sup> There are moments also when she uses satire or metaphysical means to transcend the female body’s boundaries, but that transcendence is not offered, nor is it presumably available, to the Italian women Loy describes.

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>282</sup> Loy, ‘Italian Pictures’, *LLB96*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>283</sup> Loy, ‘Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots’, *LLB96*, p. 22.

<sup>284</sup> Kouidis, *AMP*, p. 26.

<sup>285</sup> F.T. Marinetti, ‘The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism’ (1909), in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. by R.W. Flint and translated by R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), pp. 39-44 (p. 40).

There are other limitations to the concept of Loy's 'female self'. Kouidis writes in *The Cerebral Forager*:

[T]o begin an exploration into the poetic imagination without surveying the poet's 'external' history is to neglect a major inspiration for the poetry and one of the most intriguing biographies in a generation known for its rejection of the commonplace.<sup>286</sup>

Kouidis argues that to understand a poet's work fully one must know the biographical details of the poet's life. In the same breath, she frames Loy's life within a mythologised idea of literary bohemia. Which takes precedence? Is Loy's 'external' history already transcribed in a preconceived idea and how much could the 'facts' of Loy's life or the autobiographical elements of Loy's writing be distanced from 'a generation known for its rejection of the commonplace'? Kouidis paints an all too familiar picture: 'Memoirs, a few letters and family reminiscences furnish the scraps of a life fluctuating between neurasthenia, probably the result of [Loy's] Victorian heritage, and a positive confrontation of the diverse social, psychological and artistic events shaking the twentieth-century world'.<sup>287</sup> The scant availability of biographical information at the time of Kouidis's study and a combination of hearsay from interviews with Loy's daughters combine to portray Loy as a self-absorbed, undisciplined and mentally unstable writer. Even if this were the case, it should have no bearing on how Loy's poetry is judged. Yet, Kouidis's attempt to distinguish between Loy as a historical person and Loy the poet is unsuccessful. In these two quotations from Kouidis's prologue she blurs the boundary between these two aspects of Loy:

But after Contact publications Mina Loy did not make significant advances in her art or public. Her personal life is veiled in mystery, but a lingering neurasthenia and a lack of discipline probably undermined her potential for poetic greatness indicated by poetry of the early twenties.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Virginia Kouidis, 'The Cerebral Forager: An Introduction to the Poetry of Mina Loy' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1972), p. 2. (Hereafter cited as *CF*).

<sup>287</sup> Kouidis, *CF*, p. 3.

<sup>288</sup> Kouidis, *AMP*, p. 21.

Her compassion and understanding were, it seems, channelled into her poetry, for in her life she was often indifferent or blind to the needs and feelings of others.<sup>289</sup>

Kouidis has a strong preference for the poetry Loy wrote between 1914 and 1923, and often argues for the inferiority of later work not focused on the 'spiritual autobiography' of the 'female self' that she sees as the poet's real work. In turn, the less 'successful' Loy is as a mother or sympathetic woman, the less the poetry achieves. The apparent danger of an idealized 'female self', one that must speak for a type of cohesive female experience and that is measured by contemporary standards of liberation, is twofold. Firstly, the supposed 'quest for selfhood' is too closely equated with a kind of personal, psychic liberation, and is further tainted by details of a life viewed as more or less 'successful'. In addition, it ignores the complexities that lie beyond gender in realizing a 'self' or in fact even wanting to present a cohesive self—which may not be the poet's aim. For example, if we are to consider the implications of a 'modernist' subject, then the idea of wholeness is challenged by the decentred self of modernist writing and its own complex relationship with gender.

Revisions of modernism gradually developed within feminist re-readings of women modernist writers, and re-examinations of female modernist writers' lives began during the late 1970s. Poets such as Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) and Moore benefited from re-evaluations of a modernist canon that had been formed around central male figures such as Pound and Eliot. Some of the contentions of feminist revisions of modernism are valid. Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank* provides a detailed analysis of the importance of women to modernist history, not only as writers, but as editors, publishers and patrons. The book also highlights the neglect of early critical histories of the modernist period to recognise the technical innovations in language and form of women poets such as Stein and Lowell. Yet, a reading of the little magazines from the

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

early 1910s and 1920s reveals that many male writers, even more than women, fell outside retrospective canonising efforts. Many feminist studies of modernism opt for a more harmonious picture of solidarity among women writers than was perhaps the case, and fail to discuss those women who purposefully detached themselves from the label of the 'woman writer'. Djuna Barnes, like Loy, distanced herself from many other female writers through her satirical portraits, also not unlike Loy's.<sup>290</sup>

It is not unthinkable to contend that for much of her writing life Loy was unconcerned with 'the woman question' and would not have considered herself a woman poet. In fact, gender factors very little in her poetry after the 1920s. Women do appear in her work throughout, but Loy identifies equally with some female subjects and with figures of the genius, the Jew and of the vagrant. If anything, she enjoyed writing about exiles, those ostracized from mainstream society for whatever reason. Yet for the combined reasons of the lack of biographical information and early feminist focus on 'female' poems, Loy's reputation before the publication of Burke's biography and a widely available, reliable text of Loy's poetry has been focused on the demands of revisionist scholarship. The bringing to light of Loy's lost poetic voice distorted and discounted her own poetic project's trajectory in favour of a more selective mythologizing, ignoring her own problematic relationship with feminism.

#### 1996 to the Present: The Body in Context

The publication of Burke's biography and a widely available edition of Loy's poetry, *LLB96*, solidified critics' and readers' images of Loy's writing and life. *LLB96* differs significantly from its immediate predecessor, *LLB82*, published by the Jargon Society in 1982. Both collections were edited by Conover; he is currently also Loy's literary executor. His title for the 1982 version suggests that it is the 'last' in a series

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<sup>290</sup> Djuna Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* (1928) is an example of her satire.

and implies that there will be no further editions published. Not only is the Jargon Society print framed as the final word on Loy's oeuvre, it is the most complete to date, including nearly thirty previously unpublished poems in addition to those published during her lifetime in various magazines. Why would Conover choose to name the post-*LLB82* edition 'lost'? One possible reason is offered by Conover's introduction to the text: 'First and last, this book is an attempt to restore a great poet's lost voice'.<sup>291</sup> 'First and last' refers to the main objective of *LLB96* but also interestingly suggests that Conover's text should be considered both the 'first and last' authoritative collection of Loy's poetry. Perhaps the statement reveals his belief that *LLB96*, with its copious editorial notes and detailed appendices, is superior to all previous versions and most accurately speaks for Loy's 'lost' voice. In a later paragraph, Conover describes *LLB96* as the 'Twentieth-century poetry's lost guidebook' that 'surfaces after we thought all the evidence was in'.<sup>292</sup> His preoccupation with issues of editorial accuracy, authority and 'evidence' against the backdrop of 'twentieth-century poetry' speaks of an increase in Loy scholarship and of the duties and dangers involved with representing a poet's oeuvre. New 'facts' and details about Loy's life in Burke's biography, combined with nearly twenty years of Loy criticism, attempt to highlight the lack of attention Loy's life and poetry had received. Now less 'lost' than ever, Loy's literary reputation since 1996 works between two extremes: the comfortable image of Loy's poetry rooted in the narrative provided by Burke's biography, and the amplifying questions of how Loy's writing seems to oppose a perceived progression of her life and critical reputation thus far. In addition to such emerging concerns among Loy critics is the question of whether or not Loy is truly a feminist poet, an avant-garde poet or both, and what implications that has for a historically perceived male avant-garde. Prompted over the years by Pound's claim that Loy wrote distinctively 'American' poetry, critics post-1996 have

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<sup>291</sup> Conover, 'Introduction', *LLB96*, p. xii.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

scrutinized nationalist conceptions of modernism and the avant-garde. Loy's residence in five countries and fluency in four languages makes her an ideal advertisement for a kind of international modernism, an idea that has gained popularity among critics over the last ten years.

Since Koudis's and Burke's early criticism in the 1980s and feminist revisionist scholarship, Loy has been repeatedly pitched to audiences as a feminist poet or as using a 'feminist' poetics. Linda Kinnahan's book, *Poetics of the Feminine: Authority and Literary Tradition in William Carlos Williams, Mina Loy, Denise Levertov and Kathleen Fraser* (1994), added to this trend by figuring Williams as a poet of the 'feminine', in opposition to a Poundian 'masculine' modernism, and by reading Loy, Levertov and Fraser as his poetic 'daughters'.<sup>293</sup> Loy's feminism influenced Williams, Kinnahan argues, and her poetics would inspire the next generation (Levertov and Fraser) to take up where she left off in a liberation of the female poet's voice. According to Kinnahan, their 'gender-inflected' poetics is a revolutionary counterstrain against poetry that supports or operates within institutionalized forms of gender.<sup>294</sup>

[Loy's] project of defining feminism for herself grounds her poetry of this period, drawing upon ideas circulating within the multifaceted feminist movement. To look at Loy and Williams together forcefully reveals their shared concerns over sexual desire, gendered authority, and the social construction of the gendered self. Inflected by feminism's challenge to conventional hierarchies of power, Williams' poetry during his years of closest poetic and personal association with Loy throws the assumption of male authority [as it relates to Williams' work] into question.<sup>295</sup>

Kinnahan's phrase 'defining feminism for herself' alludes to the innate tension of feminist studies on Loy. Would Loy have aligned herself with the concerns of the feminist movement as it was forming in the first two decades of the twentieth century?

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<sup>293</sup> See Linda A. Kinnahan, *Poetics of the Feminine: Authority and Literary Tradition in William Carlos Williams, Mina Loy, Denise Levertov, and Kathleen Fraser* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1-3, for a discussion of Williams's influence on these poets and the problematic label of poetic 'daughters'.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

Can Loy's writing be read as feminist and be removed at the same time from the political struggle for education, voting rights and improved conditions for the lives of the 'common' woman? A cohesive feminist movement that promoted all the causes listed in the above quotation did not exist. However, we can say with some certainty that the faction of feminism Loy was most familiar with was tied up in the ideas and writing of Margaret Sanger. Letters to Loy's friends, the painter Frances Stevens, Mabel Dodge, and her literary agent Van Vechten, refer to Loy's feelings on 'the woman question' and Sanger's magazine *The Woman Rebel*. In her letter to Dodge, Loy writes: 'Have you any idea in what direction the sex must be shoved—psychologically I mean?'<sup>296</sup> According to Burke's reading of these letters, 'Mina was not optimistic about feminism's current direction, since "slaves will believe that chains are protectors"'.<sup>297</sup> To Van Vechten, Loy wrote: 'What I feel now are feminine politics, but in a cosmic way that may not fit in anywhere'.<sup>298</sup> It is tempting to read these quotations in reference to Loy's personal situation during these years, when she was living in Florence and having affairs with Marinetti and Papini. Loy's reaction to the misogyny and violence of the Futurist movement has often been seen to take the form of her satirical 'love' poems and her two radical prose works, 'Aphorisms on Futurism' (1914) and 'The Feminist Manifesto' (1914).

Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' has occupied centre stage in the argument over her feminist credentials. Mary Galvin writes in *Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers* (1999) that 'as a poet and an artist, [Loy] believed her role was to help effect a change of consciousness, particularly in regard to attitudes toward sexuality'.<sup>299</sup> Galvin suggests that Loy's feminist leanings are twofold: on the one hand she feels an artistic

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<sup>296</sup> Letter from Loy to Mabel Dodge, quoted by Burke, p. 179. Burke does not give a date for this letter, but it appears to have been written while Loy was living in Italy in 1914.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>299</sup> Mary Galvin, *Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), pp. 51-81 (pp. 64-65).



duty to subvert traditionalist, masculine structures within the language of poetry, and, by doing so, she affects women more generally by challenging the sexually repressive attitudes of her society. Her social responsibility is based on her role both as an artist and as a woman. Galvin intriguingly uses only half of the above quotation, 'What I feel now are feminist politics' as support for her belief in Loy's feminist sympathies; she ignores Loy's feeling that her own feminism did not fit into any contemporary manifestation of feminist ideas. In what is one of many errors in Galvin's text, Loy's original use of the word 'feminine' is replaced with 'feminist'.<sup>300</sup> Galvin cannot be entirely blamed for this error; she cites *LLB82* as her source and, indeed, in the biographical section, 'Time-Table', Loy is misquoted.<sup>301</sup> However, Galvin goes on to claim that this quotation came from a letter to Dodge, when in actual fact it was written to Van Vechten.<sup>302</sup> Conover's text does not attribute it to any source, so this assumption is entirely Galvin's. 'Feminine' poetics, reminiscent of Kinnahan's usage, might be simply the use of 'woman' as a subject. More likely, what Loy meant by feminine poetics was a complex portrayal of the lives, situation and positionality of women within the 'sex war'. The term 'feminist' refers more specifically to the historical movement towards women's equality (however defined or qualified by different factions) and to Loy's political engagement with its ideologies. Loy never chose to publish her 'Feminist Manifesto'; it was not until *LLB82* that the document was printed. It is possible that Conover's 'misreading' of 'feminine' for 'feminist' was his own attempt to place Loy within the feminist movement of the early twentieth century.

Loy's writing is indeed interested in questions central to the early feminist movement, but the pessimism that Loy expressed in her correspondence and her choice not to publish her manifesto have left critics to conjecture about her short-lived,

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<sup>300</sup> Galvin, p. 64.

<sup>301</sup> Conover, 'Time-Table', *LLB82*, p. lxviii.

<sup>302</sup> Galvin, p. 64.

feminist sympathies. If her poetry was ‘feminist’, it was in its detached treatment of women’s lives; as discussed earlier, the women that she writes about in her potentially ‘feminist’ poems are silent objects, without subjecthood. Loy’s tendency to speak for her subjects from the outside appears more odd now than perhaps it did during her lifetime, owing to the debates over ‘self’ in more recent feminist scholarship. Loy’s biography and the discovery of previously unpublished texts (such as her ‘Feminist Manifesto’) have contributed to critical readings of her early work as feminist. On Loy’s writings about the position of artistic geniuses, Galvin suggests that Loy’s ‘we’ ‘may represent the modernist artists, poets, and intellectuals presented as outsiders...but “we” may also include the sexual “deviant”, the nonpatriarchally [sic] defined “female”’.<sup>303</sup> In other words, she imagines that Loy may be referring to a community of women who openly defy ‘patriarchal’ definitions of femininity. Galvin’s attempts to re-shape Loy’s words in favour of a ‘feminist poetics’ swing between using the support of biographical ‘fact’ and ignoring it. The poem about which Galvin writes, ‘Apology of Genius’, was written most likely as a response to the 1921 *Little Review* trial over the US government’s censorship of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

A delicate crop  
of criminal mystic immortelles  
stands to the censor’s scythe.<sup>304</sup>

Following Loy’s return to Paris in 1921, she included this poem in a letter to the poet Scofield Thayer with a description of the situation of artists in post-war Paris.<sup>305</sup> In the same year, she also published a treatise in an issue of *The Little Review* devoted to artistic freedom of expression. ‘International Psycho-Democracy’ is Loy’s post-war plan for human psychic liberation and a society formed on the principles of cooperation, intelligence and equality. She argues for ‘intellectual heroism as a popular ideal in place

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<sup>303</sup> Galvin, p. 80.

<sup>304</sup> Loy, ‘Apology of Genius’, *LLB96*, pp. 77-78 (p. 78).

<sup>305</sup> Burke, p. 308.

of physical heroism encouraging the expression of individual psychology'.<sup>306</sup> Her treatise does not describe a society stratified by gender; her encouragements are directed towards both sexes equally, and are almost too little troubled by the differing opportunities for men and women. As I mentioned earlier, feminist readings of Loy's poems tend to focus on her early writing and then assume an unchanging attitude in her later work. However, the shift in Loy's work away from a preoccupation with the lives of 'everyday' women towards the lives of geniuses and artists signals a change in her sympathies towards those she wanted to align herself with and with whom she might have identified.

In 1998, The National Poetry Foundation (USA) collected twenty articles and various pieces of Loy-related information, including a transcript of her only taped interview, in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*. Conceived as a partner piece to the biography and *LLB96* published two years earlier, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* formulates an image of Loy that is consistent with that presented by the earlier two works. Her biography, *LLB96* and this collection of essays form a kind of triumvirate of authority on Loy's poetics and her literary reputation. The last two sections of *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* are of particular interest. They are not composed of traditional 'critical' articles. The first is called 'The Poet's Corner', and is a collection of creative pieces from poets as diverse as Kathleen Fraser and Anne Waldman. The last section of the book is a complete bibliography of Loy criticism up to 1998, compiled by Marisa Januzzi. Here we have two different portraits: one, of the poet-mentor and the other, of the critical corpus of Mina Loy.

The question of influence is one that was originally raised by Rexroth's *Circle* tribute. One gauge of Loy's literary value is how poets of subsequent generations rate

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<sup>306</sup> Loy, *LLB82*, pp. 276-282 (p. 282). Reprinted from *The Little Review*, vol. 8 (Autumn 1921) 14-19.

her work as ‘contemporary’. The poet and critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s ‘A Letter on Loy’ from 1994 is included in this section. In her letter, DuPlessis begins:

It’s odd to write, as a poet, on Mina Loy, because the usual narrative under these appreciative circumstances is a narrative of influence, mapped out as a line. These narratives usually go as follows: there was a poet, mighty or at least intriguing and suggestive. Often one has always heard this poet’s name. The name itself became a talisman. One read this poet’s works as oneself came into poetry, or just inside that vocation. It set a standard. It was a model. It was a desire. It was an aspiration. An inspiration. The possible poignancies of the poet’s life (such as illness, early death) somehow ennobled one’s own hopes—if only with such chancy optimisms as resisting early death or fighting illness. The nature of the poet’s work made a sound which often, though not always, a younger poet might try to ventriloquize, as if s/he were a dummy on the knee of the master. And so on. This bio-bibliographic encounter, with all its awkwardness, is a measure of a tremendous yearning.<sup>307</sup>

This straightforward, if not slightly self-mocking, narration of poetic influence admits a biographical as well as a stylistic draw for poets seeking poet-mentors. Yet DuPlessis problematizes this immediately with her assertion that ‘such a narrative is absolutely not available to my generation of [women] writers where certain other [women] writers are concerned...when the confrontation with their work occurs, such writers feel like contemporaries of the present’ (DuPlessis’s brackets).<sup>308</sup> Although DuPlessis admits that there are many men who have been equally ‘forgotten’ by literary history, her contribution to *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* is a different kind of criticism. It is not based on the comparative value of Loy’s experimentalism for her contemporaries but on the worth of Loy’s experiments to poets writing now. DuPlessis comments on the relationship between critics, poets and poet-critics:

One might argue for my...influence on Loy: by virtue of the poems highlighted in contemporary readings a certain Loy is created and sustained. One might argue for a community of interest between us—the intensities of our feminisms, both filled with skepticism about pieties, inflect the nature of our poetries. One might argue for Loy’s proleptic influence upon me...This is the imaginary prolepsis: now that I know her work, I cannot but accept that the wiry, vocabulary-laden, argumentative, condensed poetry she writes has always been

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<sup>307</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, ‘A Letter on Loy’, in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. by Maera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, ME.: National Poetry Foundation, 1998), pp. 499-501 (p. 499).

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

an ancestor of my own, even though I did not know it for the bulk of my writing career.<sup>309</sup>

DuPlessis speaks not just for the poet-critic but for the critic too. Critics, like poets, fashion their own image of those who influence them or their writing. That voice appeals to their own concerns and they do, as DuPlessis says, create and reflect a 'community of interest' that moulds the 'contemporariness' of our literary ancestors. In other words, both critics and poets write themselves into narratives of influence; it is through these that they restore symbols and myths in line with social and artistic 'progress', the end of which only we can predict, influence and affect. Barbara Guest, a poet belonging to the New York School, also contributes to the 'Poet's Corner' section. She believes that 'Loy may be more "modern" and more "contemporary" than many of the poets who then appeared in little reviews. The originality of her harsh juxtapositions (a very Loy phrase) does not align itself with Imagism or Eliotism or William Carlos Williams'.<sup>310</sup> According to Guest, Loy was an 'outsider' among the modernist poets. Guest implies that Loy's work instead more closely resembles the late twentieth-century Language poetry movement, for which 'the more imagistic word is on the decline'.<sup>311</sup> By comparing Loy's work to Language poetry, a dominant movement from the 1970s to the 1990s, Guest reinforces the relevance of Loy's poetry to poets of her own era. She is also connecting modern poets to a tradition, in the same way the Black Mountain poets sought Loy's work out in the 1960s. The act of tracing literary inheritance allows contemporary poets to place themselves in an aesthetic history. Finding an alternative, non-canonical lineage exalts both literary ancestors and their heirs in moments of poetic revolution by highlighting a need for change and by calling for wider, less exclusive histories.

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<sup>309</sup> DuPlessis, p. 500.

<sup>310</sup> Barbara Guest, 'Note on Mina Loy', in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. by Maera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, ME.: National Poetry Foundation, 1998), p. 497.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

Loy's marginality is also a result of what was chosen retrospectively as the 'centre' of modernist poetry. If critics had chosen the poet and editor Alfred Kreymbourg or Loy's editor Robert McAlmon as literary heroes of modernism, her reputation would have been different. Kreymbourg and McAlmon were not 'critics' like Eliot and Pound, nor were they as invested as the latter in canonization. The 'body' of Loy's work—contested, re-released, re-edited, sexualized and de-sexualized—appears less mysterious than it did in 1958. Then the publication of Loy's *LBTT* seemed to some like the 'opening of King Tut's tomb' and was passed around like a 'secret handshake' amid rumours of Loy's tragic and glamorous life.<sup>312</sup> Before Burke's biography, Loy scholars read her poems in search of her life; now her life is read in terms of which poems she produced at which time. One advantage for Loy's readers today is that the biography provides events against which one can assess the poet's potential reasons for writing. However, what such knowledge demonstrates is that, ironically, the most 'stable' model of the 'modern self' is one that lacks fixity. Loy's shifts from Futurism to feminism and to other ideological currents in the early twentieth century are the best 'evidence' for allowing multiple contradictory readings at once, which in time will blur the mythic image with which Loy has come to be associated.

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<sup>312</sup> Jonathan Williams, 'A Note', *LLB82*, p. xiii.

### Chapter Three

#### **‘No Concrete Proof’: Modern Anxiety in ‘The Child and the Parent’ and ‘Islands in the Air’**

The presumption that the cause of life is biological will appear ridiculous—when it becomes evident that the body is for operative convenience the ‘island in the air’ to which the Electrolife is anchored—or in which—focused. For the ‘spiritual’ religion teaches us the body is a peaceful instrumentation over which it being a microcosm a man has dominion—for the materialist allows it to become a parasite of most various destructive resources, if not being dominated by the self-realizing electrolife.<sup>313</sup>

The above quotation is from an undated notebook page archived among Loy’s papers under the heading ‘Notes on Metaphysics’. Each of these ‘notes’ meditates on related themes: religious faith and twentieth-century science; the creative power of man and god; the ‘spiritual’ experience of ‘being alive’; and the principles of Christian Science. Loy describes bodily existence in terms of mechanical and atomic forces, such as electricity. However, she removes these forces partly from their scientific context; electric energy is deified, as in the case of the ‘electrolife’. The ‘electrolife’ is an essential, universal current that connects the mortal body to its creator by means of conduction. In her reworking of religious ideas, Loy frames them in scientific terms or the quantitative formulae of physics. Another of these ‘Notes on Metaphysics’ offers the ‘equation’: ‘[t]he universe=absolute presence. All dimension time space contract to the hereness of one Being, and this hereness [is] identical with the hereness of all beings of all time’.<sup>314</sup> She quantifies absolute presence, or ‘hereness’, as an algebraic constant. ‘Hereness’ is indivisible and no coefficient alters its value. Simply put, Loy argues that in the universe, man’s individual life and all of creation are one and the same. It follows then that any one life has the same ‘value’ as the entire universe.

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<sup>313</sup> Mina Loy, ‘Notes on Metaphysics’, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature, MSS 6, Mina Loy Papers, box 7, folder 191, undated, unnumbered pages. (Hereafter cited as YCAL).

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

For Loy, such revelations appear to be central to the joint acts of perception and artistic creation. If a shared divine force permeates an individual's existence then the value of art is also universal. The making of art becomes a religious calling, one that unites people not only with their creator but also with mankind. Loy writes that 'only creative men are activated by anything but apprehension' and argues that historically religion has incited that 'aboriginal fear of being clubbed on the head while implanting the seed indispensable to human succession'.<sup>315</sup> Activating that 'seed', which is bodily, sexual and creative, is the responsibility of the 'creative' being.<sup>316</sup> Another note develops this idea further:

Jesus Christ availed us the concept of love—the cohesion of the individual to plurality—Love the deific juncture of the creator and the created—of the individual with plurality—and of these created one with another—the universal intercommunication. The creative impetus [...] is the recognition of the individual's collective identity in God.<sup>317</sup>

Indirectly, Loy equates an individual's creative act with Christ's 'love' of 'plurality', or mankind. In another notebook page, she paraphrases John 10:10 in the Gospels: 'I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly'.<sup>318</sup> Loy identifies herself with Christ as the 'good shepherd', who leads man into salvation.<sup>319</sup> By following Christ's example, the artist redeems humanity and unites the creator with the physical world. The artist is both man and god, and he or she channels the universe through the communication of a 'collective identity'.

Loy's archivists might have labelled her 'Notes on Metaphysics' more appropriately as 'notes on religion'. Her conversion to Christian Science in 1909 is detailed in Carolyn Burke's biography of Loy. It appears that Loy shared her beliefs with Joseph Cornell, Julien Levy and her daughters; in letters she wrote of the healing

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.



power of 'C.S.' or the 'Science'.<sup>320</sup> Two pages from what appears to be an undated letter in Loy's hand reveal her apprehension about the traditionally anti-materialist nature of Christian Science practice.

I am bothered by what materialists call escapism such as smoking and crossword puzzles—whereas I want to feel calm enough to work steadily. I am sure my work is better than it was ever—and I enjoy it—when I am not worried by the past—my husband I loved was murdered in Mexico—my son kidnapped by a divorced father and died of ill-treatment—I have struggled with poverty and almost died of real starvation—But all the time I have tried to understand faith—Mrs. Bayer [Joella, Loy's daughter] told an acquaintance that she wondered if I had cancer—and this has depressed me—because of the constant harping on this fear—surrounding humanity—and one wonders what might happen if one is not a good enough Christian Scientist [...] I have found in C.S. as my first wonderful healer explained one cannot in the least iota admit any other law into one's consciousness—one had to give up all reliance on material [sic] [...] But dear friend it is so easy to understand intellectually—I find—it is funny I had not a religious nature...<sup>321</sup>

It is unclear to whom her letter is addressed. Presumably, her 'dear friend' is unaware of the biographical details of her life, and is acquainted with Loy's daughter, Joella Bayer. It does not appear at least that she knew the letter's intended recipient intimately, though it may be possible that Loy is reiterating her personal history as a series of contributing factors for her present condition. It seems reasonable to assume that this letter dates from Loy's residence in Aspen late in her life, after Joella had married Herbert Bayer, roughly between 1953 and her death in 1966.<sup>322</sup> Her letter betrays an unease with the Christian Science doctrine 'to give up all reliance' on material, which she associates with a refusal to dwell on the past, and the bodily experiences of starvation, poverty and death. Loy's vision of the 'electrolife' and her writings on mysticism reorient the body as a strong, central aspect of faith and creation.

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<sup>320</sup> Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 117.

<sup>321</sup> Loy, 'Notes on Metaphysics', YCAL MSS 6, box 7, folder 191, undated fragment. Loy has drawn a diagram of the 'materialist' and the 'mystic' bodies. In her drawing of the 'materialist', the 'rays of awareness that descend from above are absorbed within the body. In the 'mystic' drawing, these rays are projected back up and outwards. Her drawings suggest that the 'mystic' receives divine signals and communicates with God, but the 'materialist' merely consumes.

<sup>322</sup> Burke, pp. 425-440. Joella and Herbert Bayer were married in 1944.

It is likely that her choice of electric force as a metaphor for the divine spirit draws from Christian healing practices that involved electricity. In the mid-eighteenth century, John Wesley founded the Methodist Church based on his belief in the ‘compatibility between electricity and divine power’.<sup>323</sup> According to Amanda Porterfield’s historical account of Christian healing practices, Wesley ‘viewed electricity as a subtle form of fire pervading and animating the universe, enlivening the air, and running through the blood and nervous system, making the human body “a kind of fire machine”’.<sup>324</sup> The early Methodist Church promoted the use of electricity as a form of disease-counteracting therapy. Science and faith healing was taken up by the Pentecostal Church and Seventh-day Adventists, and the combination of divinity, the body and death was implicit in mesmerist experiments (the founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worried over becoming a channel ‘for Satan’s electric currents’).<sup>325</sup> By negotiating a spiritual link to the soul within the body, Loy redirects the materialist’s focus on bodily suffering. In doing so, she investigates the divine potential of Man’s body as it sees, feels, perceives, and most importantly, creates.

In her twenty-page long, unpublished treatise on faith, ‘History of Religion and Eros’, Loy returns to the idea that ‘man is a covered-entrance to infinity’, which also appeared in ‘Being Alive’.<sup>326</sup> It is possible that her ‘Notes on Metaphysics’ were the basis for ‘History of Religion and Eros’ (hereafter referred to as ‘History’); sections share similar language and ideas about spiritual evolution. In the archive folder of ‘History’, handwritten fragments allude to the text’s possible influences. She writes that in ‘1920 Havelock Ellis told me that, in England [,] women were becoming suspicious

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<sup>323</sup> Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 163.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid. Porterfield’s book provides an extensive account of electric healing practices within Pentecostalism and Mesmerism.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>326</sup> Loy, ‘Being Alive’, YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 20, undated typescript. See Chapter One for an analysis of ‘Being Alive’.

of marriage'.<sup>327</sup> She describes a conversation with Ellis in which he surmised that ninety percent of English women found no physical pleasure in sex. Her response was to refer to an article on 'atomic theory' that claimed the energy in one 'little finger' could blow up the whole of Boulevard Montparnasse.<sup>328</sup> Ellis's 'clear blue youthful eyes' hardened and he hissed 'you're mad!'<sup>329</sup> In another fragment Loy argues that initially Freud's 'contribution lay in ridding people of the blind shame veiling biological function'.<sup>330</sup> She later credits Freudian psychoanalysis as having equated God with the 'Unconscious', and religious mysticism with confession.<sup>331</sup>

Certainly evolutionary theories and scientific advances in genetics contributed to her crossbreeding of religion and science. As I mentioned in Chapter One, Loy's involvement with Italian Futurism would have exposed her to F.T. Marinetti's equation of Man's body with the mechanics of the machine. In *War, the World's Only Hygiene* (1915), Marinetti envisioned a future in which human bodies would merge with machines, anticipating much later debates about modern societies and the figure of the cyborg.<sup>332</sup> Alluding to the Darwinian principle of natural selection, Marinetti imagined that eventually a mechanical evolution would refine mankind's bodies and minds for the 'omnipresent velocity' of modern life.<sup>333</sup> Loy's concept of the electrolife and her argument that human beings receive signals electronically could be traced in part back to Marinetti's ideas.

Loy's merging of spirituality and scientific ideas might also be traced to Frederic W.H. Myers's *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903). She wrote to Mabel Dodge that Myers's book was an example of how 'scientific

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<sup>327</sup> Loy, 'History of Religion and Eros', YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 158, undated handwritten page.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Loy, 'Conversion', YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 153, typescript p. 1.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> F.T. Marinetti, 'Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine' from *War, The World's Only Hygiene* (1915) in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. by R.W. Flint and translated by R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), p. 91.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

dissertations fall flat because they lack the element of taking risks—that art and life have’.<sup>334</sup> Myers contended that ‘the question for man most momentous of all is whether or not he has an immortal soul [...] whether or no his personality involves any element which can survive bodily death’.<sup>335</sup> Myers ideas about the infinite existence of the human soul are based on the premise that individual lives have a foundation of ‘ancestral experience’; the individual’s evolutionary consciousness scientifically proves that the soul is immortal.<sup>336</sup> Without delving too far into Myers’s and the Society of Psychical Research’s experimental findings, on which his book is based, it seems that Loy’s objection to Myers’s approach was the carefulness of his case studies. He championed the methods of ‘modern Science’ and claimed that his study followed ‘that [scientific] process which consists in an interrogation of Nature entirely dispassionate, patient, systematic; such careful experiment and cumulative record as can often elicit from her slightest indications her deepest truths’.<sup>337</sup> According to Myers, science is the purveyor of ‘indisputable truth’; it refuses to ‘fall back upon tradition’ and therefore offers an alternative to the subjectivities of religious faith or superstition.<sup>338</sup>

Loy’s construction of the body as simply an ‘island in the air’, an ‘operative convenience’ to which the soul is anchored, opposes studies that suggest personality or character is biologically determined.<sup>339</sup> She chose to title a later version of her autobiography ‘Islands in the Air’. Although it is impossible to determine which came first—the quotation about the electrolife or the title ‘Islands in the Air’—she frames human life as superior to mere bodily existence. It is difficult to reconcile this with much of her autobiographical narrative, and indeed her poetry, which details bodily

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<sup>334</sup> Letter from Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge, February 1920, YCAL MSS 196, Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, box 24, folder 664.

<sup>335</sup> Frederic W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903), p. 1.

<sup>336</sup> Myers, p. 1.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Loy, ‘Notes on Metaphysics’, YCAL MSS 6, Mina Loy Papers, box 7, folder 191, undated handwritten page.

sensations and physiological phenomena. Loy's method of self-analysis does not follow the 'dispassionate' scientific method by which Myers generates his theories on personality and the 'soul'. Myers's description of William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* as a 'human document' could not have been applied to Loy's autobiographies, at least not within the limits of his definition.<sup>340</sup> Myers wrote that 'there can be no doubt as to [Wordsworth's] conscientious veracity as an introspective psychologist' and that the poem 'is a deliberate, persistent attempt to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, about exactly those emotions and intuitions which differentiate the poet from common men'.<sup>341</sup> Certainly, the 'persistent' and 'systematic' truth telling in which Myers claims Wordsworth engaged aligns itself with his scientific method of determining Man's essential nature. It reflects the expectations of a readership for the 'whole truth' about the internal workings of creative genius. Loy's own conviction was perhaps that for the modern writer that 'whole truth' was not only impossible, but that the kernel of artistic 'intuition' was the work itself, and not the artist's claim to 'truth' or an artificial construction of selfhood.

It may seem strange that Loy's copious writings on Christianity have not factored more heavily into critical readings of her work. Scholars have written about 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose' (1923-1925) and its allusions to Old Testament mythology ('Exodus', 'Jehovah', 'Zion').<sup>342</sup> Most of Loy's later poems on religious themes have been excluded from the most recent edition of Loy's work, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996) and are therefore less well known. A few examples of 'religious' poems that were not reprinted from an earlier edition, *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (1982), are: 'Revelation' (n.d.); 'Hilarious Israel' (ca. 1944); 'Transformation Scene' (1944); 'Show Me a Saint Who Suffered' (1960) and 'Portrait of a Nun' (n.d.). Interestingly, an

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<sup>340</sup> Myers, p. 109.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Mina Loy, 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose', *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (Highlands, N.C.: Jargon Society, 1982), pp. 111-175 (p. 111, p. 112, p. 116). (Hereafter cited as *LLB82*).

early draft of 'Hilarious Israel' appears on the verso of fragments of notes for her 'History of Religion and Eros'.<sup>343</sup> Loy's didactic, and indeed revisionist, prose writings about Christianity have not been published. I have not seen any evidence that Loy attempted to publish them herself. Her editor's decision to exclude these radical, and at times self-aggrandizing, texts may result from concerns about their overall lack of coherence. Generally her treatises attempt to answer 'the great question' of 'how and where does man's creativity begin'.<sup>344</sup> In one sense, her 'failure' to arrive at a definite conclusion might reflect an ongoing, autobiographical search for her own creative origins.

Possibly dating from the 1920s to the late 1940s, Loy's notes provide an ideological backdrop for her autobiographical novels.<sup>345</sup> On the verso of her description of the electrolife, she handwrote the phrase 'notes for Book'.<sup>346</sup> Loy scholars have noted that references to her 'book' can be found in prose drafts and her correspondence that alludes to her autobiographical work. It is unclear to which version of her autobiography she is referring. However, her use of the phrase 'island in the air' suggests that her notes on the electrolife are related to her later draft of the same name. Loy's biographer and her editors have suggested that her 'book' is an amalgamation of her many autobiographical narratives, composed over a period of thirty years. I will return to this question in a later section. However, what is striking about Loy's notes is that they link the artist with divinity through a specific kind of artistic act. In order for the artist to 'universal[ly] intercommunic[ate]' with his or her fellow man, Loy argues that he or she must transcend the physical body to unite with the 'divine force' that is

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<sup>343</sup> Loy, 'History of Religion and Eros', YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 158-159, unnumbered handwritten pages.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> See Appendix for a possible chronology of Loy's autobiographies.

<sup>346</sup> Loy, 'Notes on Metaphysics', YCAL MSS 6, box 7, folder 191.

common to all mortal beings.<sup>347</sup> Yet how does she set out to achieve this through writing her own life? How does she navigate the ‘universal’ within the limits of her own perception?

In ‘History of Religion and Eros’ Loy claims:

It is not prohibitive to man, as the complete microcosm, to train his intelligence on his components and gain control of their potentialities. To avail himself of his resources, akin to the atomic, electronic etc. in order to transcend the restrictions of his overt senses.<sup>348</sup>

She suggests that, much like a mystic who receives divine visions, Man has the ability to harness the ‘electrolife’ and, in doing so, to transcend his mortal, sensual body. We also learn that Man is a ‘complete microcosm’ of the universe and that by ‘avail[ing] himself of his resources’ he can transmit God’s essence creatively to his fellow man. In ‘Being Alive’ she elaborates on the purpose of divine, artistic creation:

Being alive is the loneliness of the multitude, similar in the helpless parasitic lascivity [sic], distinct as each one crying alone and forever---“I --- I!” That individuality which like a phialed [sic] viable explosive, is conditioned by each man having, as label, a face which he alone among his fellows can never see; even as he has to compose his own psyche with the experience of the human race. He exists to the extent of the general understanding of his unless he can make a personal contribution to add to this human experience of which he is composed.

He has no concrete proof of being other than a soft machine that moves in a landscape, and thus we see him, when looking from long distance, where he first appears as a pale creature stirring against a wall of green and later as a clothed creature surrounded by erected stone. But taken from close-up, as if he formed a covered entrance to infinity, he would seem to include something as illimitable as the universe external to him.<sup>349</sup>

An individual’s ‘personal contribution’ to the ‘multitude’ is his or her own ‘human experience’. Shared experience is ‘proof’ of the ‘I’’s existence and it saves him from ‘loneliness’. This transmitted experience brings the individual closer, and reveals the ‘illimitable’ universe within him. This ‘universe’ could be the infinite force common to

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Loy, ‘History of Religion and Eros’, YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 159, typescript p. 3.

<sup>349</sup> Loy, ‘Being Alive’, YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 20, p. 2 of typescript.

all man: Loy's 'electrolife'. Her description of Man as a 'machine' or an 'explosive' who harnesses 'atomic' energy is similar to her anecdotal conversation with Ellis. It also bears a likeness to Wesley's own writings on electric forces within the body and the human machine.<sup>350</sup> She elaborates on man's 'face' or 'label':

If being alive is having a face, that window which is identical with the being who looks out of it, one can imagine a man who had never seen his own reflection even in a pool as remaining one with the air, or being stuck in an impersonal scenery as part of a back-drop from which he was incapable of making a conscious advance.<sup>351</sup>

Through writing her autobiographies, is Loy seeking her 'reflection', or 'face', in order to make 'a conscious advance'? It would appear that the value of 'being alive' rests in self-realization through scrutinised experience. As I will discuss in the following section, Loy's autobiographies exhibit an increasing investment in sharing proof of having existed.

In the Introduction, I outlined the criticism that has been levelled at Loy's autobiographical prose since Loy scholarship began in the 1980s. Scholars have interpreted these manuscripts as Loy's attempt to explain or unify a 'self' for herself as well as for her reader. Certain scholars argue that Loy unfairly apportions blame for her upbringing by condemning her mother's Victorian ideals and by her essentialist definitions of the Jewish and Christian 'race'. Assertions of Loy's 'failure' to create a unified 'self' recur throughout the few discussions of these drafts. Mainly they hinge on the belief that autobiographical writing must achieve a coherent narrative unity, and that her redrafting (if the manuscripts themselves are revisions of one life story) betrays an inability to do so. However, Loy's notes for her 'book' imply that she does not claim to explain or historicise her own life; the unity that some scholars expect undermines what

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<sup>350</sup> Porterfield writes: '[John] Wesley viewed electricity as a subtle form of fire pervading and animating the universe, enlivening the air, and running through the blood and nervous system, making the human body "a kind of fire machine"'. She cites John Wesley, *The Desideratum: or, Electricity Made Plain and Useful in The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (Bristol, 1773), pp. 284-396.

<sup>351</sup> Loy, 'Being Alive', YCAL MSS 6, p. 7 of typescript.



might be Loy's autobiographical project. Her prose set up textual barriers in order to defy the reader's expectations of a life that is rooted in a coherent selfhood. Loy's narrative voice mimics the communication of a universalized being and in doing so keeps her reader at a distance. While her ideas about the possible function of art seem to unite her with her audience, they also dilute the personal implications of her confessional tellings into something more general and abstract.

In the following section I will compare Loy's 'The Child and the Parent' and 'Islands in the Air', two linked autobiographies written roughly twenty years apart, and show how these two drafts' narrative voices manipulate ideas of the universal and of the personal. 'The Child and the Parent' and 'Islands in the Air' (hereafter referred to as 'Child' and 'Islands') share common versions of a few chapters. A note from Joella Bayer, appended to the archive manuscript of 'Child', suggests that 'Child' is an earlier draft of 'Islands'.<sup>352</sup>

The archived manuscript of 'Child' consists of nine chapters, numbered III-XII. It shares Chapters Four and Five with 'Islands'. Chapters Six to Twelve are not carried over into 'Islands' and do not appear in any other autobiographical drafts. The final typescript of 'Islands' has ten chapters but is significantly longer than 'Child'.<sup>353</sup> The close similarity between parts of these two drafts poses an obvious problem. How might one differentiate between the two if they contain only slightly varied wording? How can one typescript or handwritten note be definitively attributed to one manuscript or the other? Each folder contains multiple typescripts of the same chapter, which makes it difficult to determine which draft is earlier or later. Most of these typescripts bear the typed title 'Islands in the Air', but two that are untitled are included in the 'Islands'

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<sup>352</sup> I quote Bayer's prefatory note to Loy's manuscript of 'The Child and the Parent' in the Introduction. YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folders 11-19.

<sup>353</sup> Throughout my discussion of 'Child' and 'Islands' I have referred to what appears to be the most revised typescript as the 'final' draft. In the case of 'Child' this is simpler, fewer drafts exist. 'Islands' however has multiple typescripts. I have followed the archivist's suggestion in choosing the draft that seems most finished, and indeed some of these scripts have Loy's notations to support this. See the Appendix for a more complete explanation of this selection process.

manuscript folder. Based on the physical appearance and on the altered order of the chapters shared by the two versions, it is arguable that these untitled chapters are the misplaced first two chapters of 'Child' and not drafts of the first chapters of 'Islands'.<sup>354</sup> An examination of the change in narrative voice Loy employs in the twenty years between the drafting of the two autobiographies depends on the separating out of these intertwined versions. The erroneous placement of these two chapters of 'Child' only becomes apparent with a close reading of the first chapter of 'Islands', entitled 'Hurry'.

'Hurry' is the only published section of the 'Islands' manuscript.<sup>355</sup> Although this chapter was published as 'Chapter 1', this contradicts Loy's own handwritten note on the back of the first manuscript page that 'Hurry' was to be 'an experimental introduction'.<sup>356</sup> Loy's narrative voice in 'Hurry' claims that her introduction was written after the main text of 'Islands' was finished. 'Hurry' navigates the interface between Loy's experience of the present and her accumulated memories of the past. The events of the introduction are fairly straightforward. Though unnamed, the female narrator recounts her arrival home late one night to find her apartment in disarray. Several objects, including lipstick-soiled tissues are described; each reflects the narrator's sense of discomfort at having erupted into a kind of divine psychic mess. The first of these is a black pair of shoes. Each shoe points in a different direction; one points straight at her and the other is set out at a right angle. Loy writes: 'Something remarkably sinister in their imperusable vagrancy brought me up short. That dead-lock gait come to the parting of the wayfarer took shape as a sign-board on my private road. Mine had been a dislocated journey, every step I had taken resulted in a jam'.<sup>357</sup> The awkward placement of the shoes represents the narrator's psychological impasse in

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<sup>354</sup> See the Appendix for the chapter listings of both 'Islands' and 'Child'.

<sup>355</sup> Antonella Francini, 'Mina Loy's *Islands in the Air*: Chapter 1', *Italian Poetry Review*, vol. 1 (2006), 236-244. (Hereafter cited as *IPR*).

<sup>356</sup> Loy, 'Islands in the Air', 'Hurry', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 58. (See verso of typescript p. 1).

<sup>357</sup> Mina Loy, 'Islands in the Air (Chapter 1)', ed. by Antonella Francini, *IPR*, vol.1 (2006), 236.

which a lack of focus and direction has prevented her from completing something yet unmentioned by the narrative. It is not long before she compares the accumulated debris around her to the abandoned writing of her own autobiography. Loy writes of this project:

The book I had felt impelled to write! Tentatively assuming that what seemed likely to me would seem likely to others. Intermittent...unfinishing, I saw how this Book in itself constituted my inhibition.<sup>358</sup>

Loy explains that her 'inhibition', an inability to complete her book, results from a lifelong tendency to allow detail to distract her by flooding the senses with a kind of entrancing beauty. The *Hurry* interferes with moments of contemplation both in Loy's life and in the Introduction—the narrative consciousness skips between intense concentration on something seemingly miniscule like a cockroach in the sink in one instance, and a row of windows across the street in another, and then breaks off into a fury over the loss of time and the nearing of her own mortality. The Introduction ends with the narrator running to the closet to literally dig the chapters of her autobiography out of a valise and concludes with her offering it to her reader so that they might compare their life with her own.

On the surface, Loy's Introduction reveals the narrator's desperation to be heard and for her existence to be validated by the act of assembling a life story for an audience. At times her self-effacements reach a martyr-like pitch, as in the following: 'No longer in touch with the world at all I was left to bear the undistributed weight of my communication [...] Two generations have evolved while I stood at the cross-purpose of the roads, my mouth open to speak or rather my pen dipped in air.'<sup>359</sup> In Antonella Francini's preface to Loy's chapter, she urges the reader to:

Imagine the desire to commit one's life to paper, to pin the essence of one's existence down to a structured narrative, which might contain and enlighten a

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<sup>358</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', *IPR*, p. 238.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

string of facts that alone account for one's growth. Imagine the torment to feel [sic] unable to construct a fabric and, overwhelmed by imagination, to succumb to waves of words as they fall away from the core of the main tale into rivulets and loose threads, magnificent for their own sake, yet straying from a desired unity.<sup>360</sup>

Her introduction repeats the word 'desire' and 'imagine' with the urgency of Loy's own narrative voice. Francini clearly sees 'Islands' and Loy's other autobiographies as unsuccessful because they do not encapsulate her life in a structured way or provide the evolution of a unified 'self'. Even though Loy's meditations on existence and consciousness are in Francini's opinion 'magnificent', they are so for their own sake as they fail to produce a coherent life within their text, however beautiful.

The main disappointment for Francini is not necessarily one that Loy would have shared. For several reasons the story which Loy presents is not one that coincides with the life which readers have inherited, not the least of which is Loy's problematic relationship with Victorian and religious ideologies and their impact on her perceived status as a modern woman. While Loy's childhood self rejects the indoctrinations of her conservative childhood, her autobiographies do not depict their author as recognizably modern. In fact, 'Islands' and 'Child' prophecy Loy's failure to overcome the shame and inhibitions of her early life. The heroic myth of Loy as the prototypical modern woman whose desire we as readers must feverishly imagine cannot help but make the reality of Loy's meditations on childhood consciousness seem remote. It would seem the worst part for scholars is that Loy neglects the apex of her artistic career and writes only about an incipient consciousness; she did not involve herself in the mythmaking memoir of other members of her circle and instead chose to describe her life before she began to write poetry.

Francini's preface privileges 'Hurry' over the rest of 'Islands' and argues that Loy's voice is more honest in this introductory chapter. Even though it may at first

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<sup>360</sup> Francini, *IPR*, p. 221.

appear that Loy is addressing her own inability to complete 'Islands', 'Hurry' is not solely an author's self-indictment for not producing. 'Hurry' and the body of Loy's 'Book' must be considered together in order to understand their joint significance to Loy's autobiographical project. If several years elapsed between the writing of 'Hurry' and the abandonment of her hidden 'Book', then the two pieces must also differ in the 'self' they mean to reflect, by virtue of the order in which they were written. Loy's 'Book' refers to an earlier autobiographical subject, and that subject is only visible to readers now through the perspective given by her 'Hurry'. The time delay gives us a sense of the difference between the speaking voices in both sections as well as of the later Loy's impression on an earlier self. Yet this book in the 'valise' is not 'Islands' as Francini suggests, but an earlier version: Loy's 'unfinishing' 'Child'.

In the archive folders that contain Chapter Two and Chapter Three of 'Islands' there are very similar additional typescripts that are labelled 'Chapter I' and 'Chapter II'. These typescripts are on the same mimeograph paper as the incomplete typescript of 'Child' that is missing its first two chapters. In the typed title for 'Chapter I, The Bird Alights' Loy has, at most likely a later date, pencilled in an additional numeral and changed it by hand from 'I' to 'II'. This alteration confirms that 'Child' is the 'Book' to which Loy refers in 'Hurry'.<sup>361</sup>

In 'Hurry' she writes:

...I ran to the closet & dragged out that valise. It was easy to pick the first chapter: 'The Bird Alights'. Here is no mysticism. I have simply used a well known symbol as an aid in describing a unique registration of consciousness in infancy. When I became aware of what was then my state of Being.<sup>362</sup>

'The Bird Alights' is the first chapter of 'Child', not 'Islands', and is the manuscript that Loy pulls out of the valise. The 'intermittent...unfinishing' 'Book' that Loy

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<sup>361</sup> Space does not permit a detailed description of 'The Child' and 'Islands' manuscripts. However, paper comparisons and close reading of both texts indicate that 'The Child' predates 'Islands' and that 'Hurry' is a re-reading (and 'Islands' is a re-writing) of 'The Child' manuscript. (See table in the Appendix).

<sup>362</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', *IPR*, p. 242.

agonizes over in 'Hurry' predates 'Islands' and is her earlier narrative 'Child'.<sup>363</sup> The Hurry, an almost supernatural force, hastens Loy to uncover the 'Child' manuscript and to revise it into 'Islands':

...Bring into view! .. A lot of foolscap in a closed valise.....The Hurry catching up the tail end of time as a lash to drive me to a last exertion, was upon me again...To gather up, to put together, to elucidate!...To what end?

Perhaps the relief of a not uncommon anxiety to produce proof of having, oneself, existence?

Moreover, discerning in these tenants of a sheet of glass a public to my contact I must hasten to complete a message orally impossible.<sup>364</sup>

Loy insists that the Hurry embodies a vital anxiety that compels her to write her life story. The Hurry opposes her inhibition while torturously driving her to prove her 'existence'. Much of Loy's introduction focuses on her own inability to 'gather up' and preserve in writing her 'orally impossible' message. Loy suggests that the Hurry specifically presses her to write; it is as though this force psychologically and artistically generates the will to create. The Hurry disrupts the present by urging Loy to document her experience of 'being'. However, intermittency is essential to Loy's product. It provides the backdrop against which finally she frees herself from the shame and fear of her upbringing.

In Loy's rewriting of the 'Child' manuscript into 'Islands' she removes the original manuscript's 'Parent' section. 'Islands's focus is squarely on the child consciousness and Loy's parents are only part of the narrative through their involvement with their daughter. Loy's decision to excise her section on the Victorian generation may have resulted from her fear that readers in the late 1940s would be too unfamiliar with the characteristics of the previous century. At the top of the first page of

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<sup>363</sup> It is also possible that 'Child' subsumed sections of 'Goy Israels', though there is no definitive archival proof of this. These two books might have been joined together at one time, and like all of Loy's novels, they describe similar scenes. Even if this is the case, the 'book' of 'Hurry' is not 'Islands', which means that 'Islands' was drafted after 'Hurry' was written.

<sup>364</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', *IPR*, p. 241.

the 'Ladies in an Aviary' typescript, Loy has handwritten the words: 'These chapters come in as attempts of a woman constantly interrupted to begin a book she is too shy to write'.<sup>365</sup> The 'chapters' to which Loy refers are the five remaining chapters of the 'Parent' section that begins with Chapter Seven, 'Ladies in an Aviary', and ends with Chapter Eleven, 'The Outraged Womb'.<sup>366</sup> Read with these words in mind, it would appear that the shame Loy claims she inherited from her mother's surveillance prevents her from being able to complete these chapters which amount to a dissection of her parents' sex life and the mystery of female sexual pleasure. Loy's shame, her mother's 'Voice' and the Hurry combine in her autobiographies with her anxiety to write in spite of these forces. Together they shape her intermittent narrative of simultaneous confession and concealment. Perhaps Loy's removal of her parents from her autobiography is a final casting off—a necessary step towards planting her narrative in the 'modern' era. How successful Loy felt she was in doing so can in part be gauged by her persistent anxiety about her manuscript and her audience's reception in 'Hurry'.

The reader's impression of 'Islands's incompleteness is founded on Loy's treatment of her manuscript in 'Hurry'. Francini's view that all of Loy's autobiographical manuscripts are parts of a single book she was 'unable to master as a single unity' depicts Loy's 'failed' project as a 'celebration of modern art and its age'.<sup>367</sup> This conflation of incompleteness, modern writing and failure requires the anxiety represented by the Hurry for the text to be considered 'modern'. However, can the narrative voice of Loy's preface be so readily trusted, or might she have had other reasons for presenting her autobiography as incomplete and, in her words, 'intermittent...unfinishing'?

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<sup>365</sup> Loy, 'Child', 'Chapter Seven, Ladies in an Aviary', YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 15, p. 15 of typescript.

<sup>366</sup> This is based on a handwritten draft of a chapter outline for 'The Child and the Parent' in Loy's Papers, YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 10.

<sup>367</sup> Francini, *IPR*, p. 225.

Loy's opening sequence is, as I mentioned earlier, fairly straightforward. She begins, 'As I arose from the twisting staircase to the landing a door stood open. On the floor in abandon, black as hearses, lay a pair of shoes. Thrown in the pattern of a tee square one walked straight toward me, the other set out on its own right angle'.<sup>368</sup> The general feeling of these lines is mixed. The 'twisting' staircase and the unexplained open door in addition to the hearse-black shoe that points ominously at her are all undeniably forbidding. But, as is the case throughout 'Hurry', the significance of objects is manipulated by an excess of detail. How do shoes 'lie' if they are at once 'in abandon' but also drawn into 'the pattern of a tee square'? In a manuscript draft of this page Loy has illustrated her description by drawing in a triangle; the specificity of the image is central to her message. The lines that follow this section are even more overwritten. Describing the scene before her as she returns home, Loy writes:

The scenic dry-goods surrounding the foot-wear presented the cubistic hay-stack of a recent school. Countless segments set at a various subtlety of degree and a wild diversity of direction piled to overlapping strata in the centre of the room and started from corners to spear the eye at every point on the ocular periphery.<sup>369</sup>

Rather than repeat the word 'shoes', Loy writes 'foot-wear', and instead of waste paper, 'scenic dry-goods'. The terms 'foot-wear' and 'dry-goods' are curious choices as they have commercial rather than aesthetic meanings; one would expect such names on a mercantile sign, as both 'dry-goods' and 'foot-wear' are general categories under which a variety of individual items can be classified. The intentionally scientific terms 'ocular periphery' and 'overlapping strata' do what science does best. They classify phenomena with great specificity, but in doing so take the actual thing being described out of the normal world of relative meaning and render it foreign. The appeal of using scientific terms is that words borrowed from physics, mathematics and chemistry have a

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<sup>368</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', *IPR*, p. 236.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236. Loy's drawing on the MSS version of 'Hurry' can be found in YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 58, typescript p. 1.



particular authority, a claim to truth which ties Loy's largely metaphysical and spiritual meditation on the nature of being and perception to 'reality' and 'fact'. Loy's authorial presence in her introduction is also injected with a fair amount of control by the language in which she chooses to set out her vision. She orients the narrative self in terms of measurements and, as though she were part of a reproducible experiment, she uses phrases like 'misanthropic readjustment of the comparative' rather than a simpler statement like 'mulled over'.<sup>370</sup>

Another example of Loy's meditations on the essence of man's soul comes from the slightly later autobiography 'Goy Israels' (hereafter referred to as 'Goy'). Goy is a pseudonym for Loy's bi-spirited childhood self, half Christian, half Jewish. The word 'Goy' comes from the Hebrew for 'people' and in common usage refers to non-Jews, while the surname Israels betrays Goy's Jewish heritage. In 'Goy' Loy writes:

If a murderer denies his guilt long enough he is telling the truth; in the time elapsed since the crime his entire atomic volume (or cellular structure) has been renewed. The one with the desire to kill has disappeared in the ether, leaving a fresh body that prefers to play Pinnochio. The affair of justice, then, is prosecuted upon memory.<sup>371</sup>

In the margin Loy has handwritten the question 'Which is correct' next to 'atomic volume (or cellular structure)'. Either way the effect is the same; regardless of whether the body is renewed in terms of volume or individual cells, Loy's (incorrect) hypothesis that the body's matter is replenished is unchanged. The authority of scientific data, of quantifiable measurements and of systems of classification lends Loy's autobiographical voice the air of objectivity. Surely if one can trace and add up the causes of one's present life through scientific analysis then whatever outcome results must be a function of exact truth, of hard evidence, rather than of less appealing subjectivities resulting from guilt, shame or a sense of loss.

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<sup>370</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', *IPR*, p. 238.

<sup>371</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folders 27-29, typescript p. 37.

To return to an earlier question: Is Loy's autobiographical voice really 'intermittent' and 'unfinishing' or is there an element of disguise to her 'inhibition'? And if so, what might her inhibition be hiding? If Loy's book, that is the supposedly unfinished draft of her autobiography hidden in a suitcase, constitutes her inhibition, then why does its unearthing and the description of its states of decay take up so much of her introduction? Is Loy confronting her reader with a kind of private archive, her abandoned book, and performing for the reader her 'failure' to publish and preserve a life story? Loy's 'valise', presumably a travelling case, concealing the proof of her 'existence' is suggestive; her 'closed' suitcase could be seen to symbolise her underlying narration of self-exile and the boundaries of personal and national identity. The valise is not forgotten; it has been hidden away and left to age and decay.<sup>372</sup> On the surface, it appears to represent the mind's gradual loss of memory; however, the valise and its contents also stand in for Loy's simultaneously ailing body, which in death will be superseded by the 'life' of her archived autobiographies. Loy means to 'escape' her reader's scrutiny by hiding behind the incompleteness natural to the archive. Yet how do we reconcile the simultaneous concealment of Loy's manuscript with the painfully descriptive, near-forensic examination of it she provides? Loy herself offers a clue. She writes: 'Had early preceptor's insistence on unconditional confession complicated by the shame they had heaped on all forms of self-expression brought me to the conscientious pass of a woman anxious, under the onus of revealing her whole absurdity, to preserve her incognito?'<sup>373</sup> 'Preceptors' refers to her mother specifically and to her mother's generation more generally. In 'Goy' Loy depicts her zealously religious mother's belief that her daughter was immoral. She writes:

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<sup>372</sup> According to Burke's biography, Loy used a 'show valise' in the 1940s to carry her designs for window displays to various companies in New York. In a sense, Loy's 'valise' in 'Hurry' has two layers of artifice, one is the design within and the other is the valise itself, which appears to be fashionable and belong to a woman of business and fashion. See Burke, p. 390.

<sup>373</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', *IPR*, p. 238.

“Be sure your sins will find you out” I hope you feel ashamed of yourself” jeers Mother. What is this nervous concussion that answers to the call of shame. How can an inexperienced child perceive that the preceptors are planting a blade in her to turn among the subliminal roots of her faculties to lop off the green shoots of initiative, while they sow shuddering seeds - - of silence and shift. The protestant harvest shall not fail. And so adolescence recedes [sic] behind a pride-like mask of one who has received the mortal wound before the battle of life has begun.<sup>374</sup>

Planted by ‘preceptors’, silence is bred by shame and the fear of being ‘found out’. The result is that the child hides behind an impenetrable ‘mask’ of defeat. According to Burke, Loy’s mother also repeatedly tore up her drawings and childhood poems for their supposed licentiousness.<sup>375</sup> In the quotation from ‘Hurry’, she suggests that the urge to confess is complicated by the ensuing shame so much so that the anxiety of telling makes her anxious to maintain her ‘incognito’. The word ‘incognito’ appears in Loy’s later poems attached to the spectral figure of the vagrant.<sup>376</sup> The unknowable quality of Loy’s homeless incognitos stems from their being overlooked; they are saint-like in their suffering but the great tragedy of their invisible lives is common, unlike the saint who is canonized. During the 1930s, at the time Loy was most likely writing early drafts of her autobiographies, a rumour circulated in Paris that Loy was not in fact a real person but a forged persona, a hoax of critics of modern poetry. According to Conover, Loy turned up at Natalie Barney’s salon on the rue Jacob and said ‘I assure you I am indeed a live being. But it is necessary to stay very unknown...to maintain my incognito, the hazard I chose was—poet.’<sup>377</sup> In ‘Hurry’, Loy figures herself as one of her common anonymous saints. She bares her wounds in an appeal for canonization; much in the same way that she turned up at Barney’s salon to reveal that she was a real person in hiding. Loy fully exploits the reader’s sympathy and by giving the impression of what Francini calls ‘a desire to pin down one’s own essence’, she is in reality

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<sup>374</sup> Loy, ‘Goy Israels’, YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folders 27-30, p. 63b.

<sup>375</sup> Burke, p. 42.

<sup>376</sup> See Loy’s poem ‘Hot Cross Bum’ in *LLB96*, pp. 133-144 (p. 143).

<sup>377</sup> Conover, ‘Introduction’, *LLB96*, p. xii.

providing yet another version of an authorial self cloaked as an unassailable autobiographical 'I'.

She artfully manipulates her audience into believing the voice in 'Hurry' as with all of the autobiographical writings—to paraphrase the American poet Anne Sexton's phrase, she fakes it up with the truth, meaning that a believable mask is one that is too true, too personal, too willing to shame itself before an audience. Loy refers to her audience near the end of her introduction: 'Apparent only in a primary effulgence of Being as bare of troubled incidence as the area of perfectibility I would point out to them, this audience at a distance would wear whatever transparencies I chose to clothe it in'.<sup>378</sup> The audience, both psychologically and temporally removed from the narrative voice, will accept Loy's version of her autobiography because it will be hidden in a seemingly transparent cloth, though it will not be transparent at all. She is masking not only herself but also her audience—whom she masks in her own authorial fantasy.

Again, Loy is hiding by emphatically confessing some version of the truth. The artfulness of the transformation of human life into fiction dressed as fact is not lost on Loy—she writes: 'But listen to me, O Islands in the Air, I have made even of your biology—a lily'.<sup>379</sup> Francini has suggested that Loy chose the 'lily flower' because it represents beauty and that her purpose is to raise human life above mere biology. However the lily is an evocative choice for other reasons. Loy often references Biblical mythology in her writing, in particular Genesis and Matthew. The lily appears in Matthew as a symbol of spiritual purity; it is antithetical to the bodily toil of mortal man. It also stands for oneness and impregnability, which is why the lily so often appears in medieval paintings alongside the Virgin Mary. Yet, the Virgin also stands for fertility, this is the dual nature of her divine conception: she is at once both chastely intact and fecund. Though on one level Loy's evocation of the lily might represent a

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<sup>378</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', *IPR*, p. 241.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*

transmutation of the living being into something beautiful and divine it also suggests a potential multiplicity of the 'self'. Another of Loy's many autobiographical pseudonyms is 'Ova'—we again see that Loy plays with the idea of one representing and changing into many varying but connected pluripotent narrative 'selves'. As in her writings on the 'electrolife' and 'Being Alive', she suggests that human biology cannot fix a spiritual self and that her autobiography is not the experience of one life, but of many—including those of her readers.

One of the potential risks of publishing Loy's autobiographies is that they might lead Loy scholars and her readers to completely align the autobiographical 'I' of each narrative with the historical person Mina Loy or with her poetic personae. The autobiographies might also continue to be excavated for 'factual padding' and 'life evidence' or be seen as literary texts divorced from the events of Loy's life. There cannot be a clear-cut opposition between readings of her autobiographies as either 'factual' or 'false'. Loy's autobiographical manuscripts are not, as her editor Roger Conover described them, 'the diaries of a rebellious young woman, raised in a Victorian English household'.<sup>380</sup> They are neither day-to-day records of a life nor do they match the expectations of the diary form. Nor do they point clearly to a casting off Victorian ideas in favor of modern ones. Loy's image as a modern woman needs to be considered further in light of her autobiographies. Can one be 'modern' and still engage with the past, even if only to reject it? If so, to what degree, and by what definitions, does the transition have to be absolute? Loy's engagement with modernity is far more interesting than recent critics have allowed. How might Loy's use of masquerade fit into our existing expectations of what a modern woman is and how a modern text operates? Critics' uneasiness with Loy's move away from writing that fits conceptions of the modern might be related to an unwillingness to acknowledge Loy's own reflections on

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<sup>380</sup> Conover, 'Introduction', *LLB96*, p. xviii.

the limits of the 'modern woman' paradigm. This is perhaps why Loy began to write her autobiographies in the years after her 'modern woman' poems. Loy's later engagement with the process of becoming modern engages with a past, real or imagined, and expresses the dilemma of living in the present moment yet being rooted in the influence of memory.

The first five chapters of 'Islands' vary only slightly from the first four corresponding chapters of 'Child'. Both versions begin with Loy's earliest childhood memories. The opening metaphor of the bird in 'The Bird Alights' represents the infant mind's first 'registration of consciousness'.<sup>381</sup> This 'winged perception' 'snared' by the body's flesh comes into contact with objects in her childhood environment, such as a mesmerizing row of glass bottles described in the second chapter.<sup>382</sup> Loy frequently offers such examples to highlight the intensity of the infant consciousness's response to the human world.

The afternoon sun shone through the bottles, through the fanlight, firing the drastic reds and yellows in a triple transparency—the blaze exploded in me. I was riddled with splinters of delight.<sup>383</sup>

Loy's memory of the bottles suggests that she experienced a saint-like ecstasy. Although she observes the phenomenon externally, the perception of colour and beauty originates inside the body as it is manifested in her mind. In these first few chapters Loy imagines that the infant consciousness sees itself and other objects as materially the same. Her portrayal of perception, as a kind of ecstatic immolation, likens consciousness to religious devotion. Loy's idea of the divine electrolife is revisited:

Quickened by that fundamental [sic] excitement combined of worship and covetousness which being the primary response to the admirable very likely composes the whole human ideal, my arms like antennae waved towards the glitter of those bottles & through a sort of vibrational extension, came into as good as bodily contact with them as if I were capable of a plastic protrusion

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<sup>381</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', 'Islands in the Air', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 70.

<sup>382</sup> Loy, 'Chapter Two, The Bird Alights', 'Islands', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 59, p. 9. Also 'Chapter One, The Bird Alights', 'Child', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 59, pp. 1-5.

<sup>383</sup> Loy, 'Chapter Three, The Beginning of the World', 'Islands', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 60, p. 12.

beyond my anatomical frontiers. Infants are always attaining to things they cannot touch.<sup>384</sup>

The child wishes to meld with the admirable, or beautiful, object in the same way as Loy's mystics and artists wish to unite with god and humanity. External objects adapt to the infant's desires. As the child physically reaches for the bottles, space connects the two through a 'vibrational extension' that, like the electrolife, inhabits all matter. It is only when the child unintentionally commits its first punishable act that it begins to differentiate between the body and the mind, and between action and thought. Loy's introduction to the dynamics of 'good' and 'evil' takes place in the fourth chapter of 'Islands' (the third chapter of 'Child'). By accidentally throwing a domino through a glass window, Loy first incurs her mother's wrath and is scolded for her innate wickedness—an accusation her mother repeats in subsequent chapters.<sup>385</sup> However, the 'accident' symbolises the grounding of Loy's infant 'bird' consciousness in the reality of the moral, and the mortal, world. Loy makes very few changes to the 'Child' chapters in 'Islands'. However, the most poignant omission is the following sentence from 'Child':

If life is a promise made to be broken, such is the voice that shouts down fulfillment, being a very echo of the Accident in which all trends or idea, rushing from opposite sources within the same confines, crash into one another and splinter to bits.<sup>386</sup>

Why is the above passage from 'Child' not carried over into 'Islands'? Loy's association of childhood self-expression with punishment dominates both chapters and remains largely unchanged. Yet this quotation hints at a subtext that she chose not to revisit in her later version. It is possible that Loy compares the loss of childhood 'innocence' with the loss of her second husband, Arthur Cravan. Cravan's

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Loy, 'Chapter Four, The Accident', 'Islands', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 61, pp. 18-22. Also 'Chapter Three, Arrival on the Scene of an Accident', 'Child', YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 12, pp. 18-24.

<sup>386</sup> Loy, 'Chapter IV, Arrival on the Scene of an Accident', 'The Child and the Parent', YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 12, p. 23.

disappearance in 1918 preoccupied Loy's poetry from the 1920s.<sup>387</sup> Her writings about their short time together depict a similar naive spontaneity in their married life. Part of Loy's interest in staging her life possibly arose from a desire for continuity and meaning, especially in the face of her husband's fatal 'accident'. By removing the above lines from 'Islands' Loy appears to regain control. Instead of giving herself the role of the fated victim, she maintains 'Hurry's' factual, quasi-scientific tone. The first chapters of 'Islands' explain her dual fascination and fear of destiny with more subtlety. However, the reader is still given no alternative but to see the course of the author's life as pre-determined by signs like the pair of hearse-black shoes in Loy's introductory chapter.

Both 'Islands' and 'Child' seek to explain the nature of the 'modern' consciousness, but both cite different causes for the formation of a 'modern' self. 'Child' looks backwards toward the Victorian era and details how it stifled emerging modern thought at every religious and moral opportunity. 'Islands' diverges from this perspective after Chapter Five. Part II of 'Child', which describes sexual and moral repression within Victorian society, is omitted in 'Islands' and replaced with sections from 'Goy'. 'Islands' combines the two previous autobiographies into one text and in doing so includes Loy's anxiety over her bi-racial identity in inter-war Europe. 'Islands' looks into the past as well as the future, albeit fearfully: at what the danger of rooting out sources of immorality and evil would mean for European Jews during the 1930s and 1940s. Loy appoints herself as a prophet and saint figure in 'Islands' by uniting her Jewish and Christian heritage and by combining her critique of 'pre-war' society and a 'post-war' context. In an early handwritten copy of 'Hurry', Loy indicates that the 'precious knowledge' she had wished to communicate to her 'fellow man' is a kind of prophetic warning. The frustration she expresses in 'Hurry' stems from not having

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<sup>387</sup> After Arthur Cravan's disappearance in 1918, Loy wrote several poems about her loss: 'The Dead' (1919), 'Mexican Desert' (1919-1920), 'Perlun' (1921) and 'The Widow's Jazz' (1927), among others.



offered ‘advice’ to her ‘companions’ or ‘good news’ when it was needed.<sup>388</sup> Written during and after World War II, ‘Hurry’ demonstrates Loy’s belief that had she successfully finished ‘Child’ or ‘Goy’ she would have been able to offer such warnings. The artistic ‘failure’ of not being able to formulate and present a single narrative and society’s failure to see history repeating itself come together in Loy’s revisions and writing of ‘Islands’: ‘Nothing has more amazed me than the idiotic apprehension of the moralists that the world during recent decades has lapsed from the purity of the pre war era’.<sup>389</sup>

In ‘Hurry’ Loy’s claim that she is unable to complete her autobiography is heightened by an aesthetic of failure within the text. Obstacles appear such as physical breaks in the form of ellipses or dashed lines, as well as moments in which the present breaks through her narration of the past. This technique is not unique to Loy’s writing; for instance, Gertrude Stein throws up similar narrative obstacles in *Everybody’s Autobiography*.<sup>390</sup> In Chapter Two, I challenged Benstock’s comparison between the supposedly ‘female subject matter’ of Loy’s poetry and Virginia Woolf’s novels.<sup>391</sup> However Loy’s and Woolf’s autobiographical writings merit comparison for reasons beyond their female authorship. It is unclear whether Woolf intended to publish her memoir ‘Sketch of the Past’, which she began writing in April 1939. The narrative breaks off after her last ‘entry’, which dates from November 1940, four months before her death.<sup>392</sup> ‘Sketch’ recounts her family life, childhood and early adolescence in Victorian London society. Memories of the Stephen family’s residence in Hyde Park Gate, of the deaths of Woolf’s mother and half-sister figure centrally in her reminiscences. Beyond this, Woolf addresses the problematic nature of memoir writing

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<sup>388</sup> Loy, ‘Hurry’, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 58. (See the verso of the handwritten draft page).

<sup>389</sup> Loy, ‘Islands’, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 71, undated page fragment.

<sup>390</sup> I elaborate on Stein’s *Everybody’s Autobiography* in Chapter 6.

<sup>391</sup> Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 387.

<sup>392</sup> Jeanne Schulkind, ‘Sketch of the Past, Editor’s Note’, *Moments of Being*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind and introduced by Hermione Lee (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 176-178. (Hereafter cited as *MoB*).

as she attempts to formulate her own life story. A childhood memory of St Ives and of 'hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach...' gives way to Woolf's self-interrogation, 'Who was I then?'<sup>393</sup> The writing 'self' intercedes:

I could spend hours trying to write [the memory of St Ives] as it should be written, in order to give the feeling which is even at this moment very strong in me. But I should fail (unless I had some wonderful luck); I dare say I should only succeed in having the luck if I had begun by describing Virginia herself.

Here I come to one of the memoir writer's difficulties—one of the reasons why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom things happened. The reason is that it is so difficult to describe any human being.<sup>394</sup>

At the beginning of 'Sketch', Woolf states that she is in the process of writing a biography of Roger Fry.<sup>395</sup> The difficulty of describing another 'human being' and potentially 'failing' to compose a life story therefore shadows Woolf's self-conscious treatment of her own transcribed memories. She begins her narrative by failing to 'describ[e] Virginia', and subsequently draws attention to this failure by concluding that she does not know how much the details of her birth and parentage 'made [her] feel what [she] felt in the nursery at St Ives'.<sup>396</sup> Failure diverts the narrative from its recollections and 'Sketch' obsessively questions the accuracy of those feelings that it brings into the present:

2<sup>nd</sup> of May...I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present—at least enough of the present to serve as platform to stand upon. It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast. And further, this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today I should not write in a year's time.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past', *MoB*, pp. 78-160 (p. 79).

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

In 1939-40, Woolf's critique of Victorian society, couched in examinations of the character of family members, is more evident than in her earlier memoir, 'Reminiscences' (1908). Most likely, at the time 'Sketch' was written the popular image of a strictly regimented moral and social Victorian order had solidified. By the late 1930s, Woolf's conception of the past has been categorised by the present moment and a gradual historicising of the Victorian and Edwardian eras in the public imagination.<sup>398</sup> It appears that the 'success' of memoir relies partly on sensing the differences between one's identity within the moments of one's life, of contrasting the 'I now' and the 'I then'. Woolf elaborates on sorting through the experiences of past selves:

Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art.<sup>399</sup>

'The cotton wool' refers to the unremembered, mundane daily activity that makes up what she argues is most of one's life. She contrasts this 'nondescript' living with 'moments of being' that are intensely felt, and intensely recalled 'exceptional' moments, which give one a 'sudden violent shock'.<sup>400</sup> If we compare Woolf's idea of a connective 'hidden pattern' with Loy's unifying concept of the electrolife it becomes evident that it is not one's 'uniqueness' that matters to Loy and Woolf. Instead, it seems that memoir shows how one conceives of (and indeed lives) his or her own life according to a common human model. In fact, it would be impossible to discern which is imposed on the other, whether it is the idea of a 'life' that shapes experience or if all lives have inbuilt their own pattern through which they come to exist. Yet the idea of a

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<sup>398</sup> In 'Sketch of the Past', Woolf refers to the preceding generation as the 'Victorian age'; this suggests that temporally she is at enough of a distance from it to conceive of that time period as socially and historically distinct from the present. One example of this is: 'The patriarchal society of the Victorian age was in full swing in our drawing room'. (See Woolf, *MoB*, p. 154).

<sup>399</sup> Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past', p. 85.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

continuum, of a consistent pattern, is ruptured within and by Woolf's and Loy's acts of writing. Reaching for the 'work of art' that is humanity alternates in these memoirs with the intensity of personal reflection. This tension for Loy was the force of the Hurry—validating existence through writing, fighting death through proving existence, and postulating historical selves.

'Goy Israels' and 'Child' could be read in light of ideas about shifting literary traditions of biographical writing. Laura Marcus argues that 'In the early twentieth century in Britain, the desire of the literary 'moderns' to mark their absolute difference from their Victorian predecessors finds one expression in the construction of "the new biography"''.<sup>401</sup> According to Marcus, the 'new biography', a term coined by Woolf in her essay-review of Harold Nicholson's *Some People*, was closely linked to simultaneous concerns over the possibility of truthfulness in recorded 'lives' and the partiality of biographers.<sup>402</sup> Victorian biography's memorializing of its subject in the form of hagiography, combined with concern about the biographer's own conscious involvement in the writing process are evidenced by Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907). Published anonymously at first, the book alludes to the age's concern over 'accurate' self-representation.<sup>403</sup> Much like Loy's own autobiographies, *Father and Son* narrates Gosse's pre-adult life, focusing mainly on his formative struggle with his deeply pious Christian father. Consciously throughout his retelling, Gosse equates his father's character and principles with an ideologically vanished and morally disowned generation, while portraying his own rebelliousness and aesthetic beliefs as reflective of a more 'modern' era.

Interestingly, it was not until Gosse was assured of his book's warm reception and popularity that he assigned his name to a fourth edition, published within twelve

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<sup>401</sup> Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory Criticism, Practice*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 90.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>403</sup> Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son* ed. and introduced by Peter Abbs (London: Penguin Books, 1983). Originally published in 1907.

months of its initial printing.<sup>404</sup> Such anxiety over his reputation was presumably the result of the potential effect personal revelation might have had on his public persona. In addition to this might also be Gosse's own uneasiness with his individuality, as his final lines suggest:

...and thus desperately challenged, the young man's conscience threw off once and for all the yoke of his 'dedication', and, as respectfully as he could, without parade or remonstrance, he took a human being's privilege to fashion his inner life for himself.<sup>405</sup>

The distance offered to his subject (himself 'the young man') as well as his defiant tone (in an otherwise polite and even narrative), is resonant of Loy's own pseudo-scientific language and detached formation of her autobiographical 'self'. Such language, coupled with his awareness of an imminent shift from conventional formations of public figures to the wilful instability of modern biography, is also revealed in his introduction. Gosse writes:

At the present hour, when fiction takes forms so ingenious and so specious, it is perhaps necessary to say that the following narrative, in all its parts, and so far as the punctilious attention of the writer has been able to keep it so, is scrupulously true. If it were not true, in this strict sense, to publish it would be to trifle with all those who may be induced to read it. It is offered to them as a *document*...(Gosse's emphasis)<sup>406</sup>

As a preface to his book, this is a remarkably firm statement. Gosse declares the factuality of his autobiography as a 'document', not only for his readership but also for himself as 'the writer'. At work in Loy's early autobiographical writing are anxieties over the division between literary and scientific modes of biographical writing. By narrating the life of the nascent and undifferentiated child, the autobiographer gauges and projects the development of the authorial adult personality. The child is pure and depicted as always within yet slightly beyond the narrated moment, displaced by the

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<sup>404</sup> Peter Abbs, 'Introduction', *Father and Son* by Edmund Gosse (London: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 9-31 (p. 9).

<sup>405</sup> Gosse, *Father and Son*, p. 251.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

intervention of the author's hindsight. The sometimes ordinary and everyday quality of Loy's, Gosse's and Woolf's childhood narrations might mean to attest to the 'factualness' of their writing—even though each author has chosen moments that are emblematic of a vital stage of development in their 'life'. The porous boundaries between the written 'subject' and the 'author' are mediated by the concern of a modern generation: consciousness and fluidities of the 'self'.

Loy suggests that in composing her own story she is improving the course of human history, and she contends in a letter to Mabel Dodge dated February 1920:

I have seen and experienced so much and such hitherto undiscovered kinds of people and circumstances—that I can see nothing but the world as a whole—and the only thing that counts is the psychology of the whole thing—and everyone is framing polite fiction about it.<sup>407</sup>

Again Loy depicts herself as the modern saint whose responsibility is to recount her sufferings for the benefit of the world. Loy reduces the broadness of her world vision and its psychology to the individual in the same way that she reinterprets Christ's love and sacrifice. Yet she cannot avoid that her 'message' is too late. By the late 1940s, when 'Hurry' was most likely written, Loy had dropped out of the artistic circles of New York and more or less ceased to publish poetry. Her only published novel *Insel* (ca. 1936-1940s), a Künstlerroman based on Loy's friendship with the German surrealist painter Richard Oelze, was at one time meant to be part of 'Islands'.<sup>408</sup> Published posthumously in 1991, *Insel* is a meditation on the failure of the avant-garde to prophesy or prevent the approaching reality of war. As a potential end to 'Islands' it challenges Loy's tense optimism in 'Hurry'. If she is not arguing that art is the most essential form of 'intercommunication' then why did she revise and edit out her

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<sup>407</sup> Letter from Loy to Mabel Dodge, February 1920, YCAL MSS 196, Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, box 24, folder 664.

<sup>408</sup> Conover's foreword to *Insel* states that this is the case. (*Insel*, p. 9). Also, Marisa Januzzi provides a detailed description of Loy's publication history, including details about her attempts to publish *Insel* as part of 'Islands in the Air'. (Marisa Januzzi, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1997, pp. 124-125). *Insel* is examined further in Chapter Six.

autobiographies into one narrative? Why bring them together in the late 1940s? Loy suggests that it is to relieve 'a not uncommon anxiety to produce proof of having, oneself, existence'.<sup>409</sup> However, each of Loy's revisions dismisses and refigures prevailing conceptions of the modern, not simply in terms of the future (the 'modern' as 'prophetic') but in terms also of the past. Loy's evocation of modernity is not limited to a rejection of the past; rather, she sees the modern autobiography as an 'unfinished project', and one that must remain 'unfinishing' and 'intermittent' in order for it to expand the modern idea. For Loy, revising the voice of the past, and thereby signalling a break into which the 'modern' can be temporarily ascribed, is the process of 'modernity'.

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<sup>409</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', *IPR*, p. 241.

## Chapter Four

### Racial and Religious Hybridity in 'Goy Israels'

In box 7, folder 188 of the Loy archive is the following handwritten quotation. It appears in red ink on an undated page fragment:

'Which inheritance has given you a dual urge towards expression which almost since the cradle has torn you asunder and these opposite urges have been dually completely thwarted by the exhortations of your opposed parents—  
You will write the oboes of your father in your ears—be continually impatient with yourself for not being able to work magical feats and eternally urged towards useless drudgery—But how can we see you from a distance—dumb marionette—as beauty confined to the office of a scarecrow—as dignity erected as a target for ridicule—as potency unimaginably impotent—an abject fear upon which is imposed an insupportable duty to corner the world—  
What have you to say for yourself—  
I beg your pardon—  
You dare not utter a word  
But have we not found that wishes materialize'—<sup>410</sup>

Several recurring themes found in Loy's autobiographical work combine here: the self-expressive impasse caused by her racial hybridity; her desire to write in spite of the guilt induced by her parents' censorship; and finally the responsibility of the artist to depict a cohesive self with which an audience may compare their own lives. The appearance of this fragment, and the way in which it is physically separate from her autobiographical texts, is alluring. It is tempting to imagine that the voice here is more 'true' to the author, because the page stands alone, and that it is capable of explaining the reasons behind Loy's continual rewriting of her life.

The red script's cruel condemnations of its subject, 'dumb marionette', 'unimaginably impotent', 'useless drudgery', are directed towards a figure that we recognise as Loy herself. However, this one-sided dialogue between the 'writing self'

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<sup>410</sup> Mina Loy, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature (YCAL), Mina Loy Papers, MSS 6, box 7, folder 188, undated page fragment. (Hereafter cited as YCAL).



and the primary voice leaves the ‘writing self’ unresponsive. The voice within this fragment is inconsistent with the narrative voice of Loy’s autobiographies. Instead, it immediately conjures up the tone otherwise reserved for Loy’s mother, the maternal censor that she called ‘The Voice’.<sup>411</sup> In this fragment is The Voice confronting ‘Loy the autobiographer’ in order to discredit the cohesive self she is piecing together? Or is Loy staging this internal confrontation between the censor and herself to convince the reader that the autobiography’s constructed ‘self’ is, indeed, ‘true’? The Voice makes it clear that Loy will fail and that her ‘beauty’, ‘dignity’ and ‘potency’, seen ‘from a distance’, will not sufficiently explain the process of her formation. Yet, what is this ‘distance’? Is it the divide between the writer’s intentions and how an audience reads and interprets a text? Or is Loy illustrating the difficult act of writing while trying to avoid the internalised censor that recurs within her autobiographical ‘confessions’? She ‘dares not utter a word’ in her own defence. It appears that the writer is silencing herself and that her self-exposure is punishable. The whirl of accusations comes from an audience that might possibly see through her. With saint-like stoicism the ‘scarecrow’ or ‘target’, whose ‘duty’ is to enlighten with her craft, becomes the victim of her own burdened honesty. The final line, ‘[b]ut have we not found that wishes materialize’—alludes to Loy’s bipartite ‘inheritance’, as the daughter of two opposing parents and religious ideologies, and her instinct to hide out of fear of being exposed but also to confess dutifully. She prophesies that the punishments she levies against her objectified ‘self’ will be fulfilled: she condemns herself to ‘potency’ that is ‘unimaginably impotent’.

Box 7, unlike most of the other boxes in the Loy archive, holds miscellaneous papers. Some are grouped loosely in folders with headings such as ‘Notes on Art’, ‘Notes on Jews’, and ‘Notes on Metaphysics’. These titles were not chosen by Loy

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<sup>411</sup> Loy refers to her mother as ‘The Voice’ in her other autobiographical manuscripts, ‘The Child and the Parent’ and ‘Islands in the Air’. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the maternal censor in Loy’s autobiographies.

herself; they were categories devised and assigned by archivists when the Beinecke Library received her papers after her death.<sup>412</sup> Box 7 also contains ‘Designs and Drawings’ and Loy’s ‘Inventions’. Patents for several defunct ideas, such as a ‘Build Your Own Alphabet’ game and a bracelet that serves as a painter’s palate, lie side-by-side with Loy’s meditations on Jewish ‘race memory’ and on the mystic nature of erotic love and Christ’s love. This clumsy grouping together of Loy’s fantastical designs with her philosophical writing adds an additional layer of masquerade to the fragment, suggestively included in the folder ‘On Art’ (reproduced above). This page’s frenzied tirade and its suggestion of a cowering, silent autobiographical subject almost seem to be another momentary glittering scheme that Loy would eventually abandon. While the narration of Loy’s bi-racial ‘self’ is as methodical as one of her treatises on art or religion, and as meticulously devised as her inventions, it would not be as quickly cast aside. The following sections detail the transitions and transformations of Loy’s racially-hybrid subject, from her first appearance as ‘Ova’ in the poem ‘Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose’ (1923-25) to her later incarnation as ‘Goy’ in the incomplete manuscript ‘Goy Israels’ (1930s) and in ‘Goy Israels: A Play of Consciousness’ (1932).

A page fragment from the 1930s ‘Goy Israels’ (hereafter referred to as ‘Goy’) manuscript numbered ‘23’ reads: ‘It is no light task to rid ourselves of our origin in antagonistic flesh.’<sup>413</sup> The use of ‘our’ and of ‘ourselves’ brings the reader immediately into a contractual empathy with the narrative’s subject, Goy. A similar, earlier projection of Goy is featured in Loy’s poem ‘Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose’ (hereafter referred to as ‘Anglo-Mongrels’) in the form of Ova. Both are the children of a Jewish Hungarian immigrant father and a Victorian Christian mother, named Exodus and Ada the ‘English Rose’ in ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ and Mr. and Mrs. Israels in ‘Goy Israels’.

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<sup>412</sup> Email correspondence and interview (April-May 2006) with Patricia C. Willis, curator of the Yale Collection of American Literature. Two pages from the ‘Goy Israels’ manuscript (p. 89 and p. 117) refer to the year ‘1930’ in the present tense, suggesting that Loy might have written at least part of ‘Goy’ in the early 1930s. See the Introduction for a description of Loy’s archive.

<sup>413</sup> Loy, ‘Goy Israels’, YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 30, undated fragment.

However, in Loy's poem Ova's origin and her parents' 'antagonistic flesh' is described differently:

The head  
of the child of Exodus  
reaches  
to the level of an abdominal  
moroseness

The moronic womb  
from which  
we gather our involuntary flesh  
hovers  
antagonistically  
over the child's at the mother's knee  
and erodes her  
with psychic larva

[...]

to the mother  
the blood-relationship  
is a terrific indictment of the flesh

[...]

resenting  
the lasting  
presence of vile origin.<sup>414</sup>

In 'Anglo-Mongrels' the 'antagonistic flesh' and her mother's 'sub carnal anger' are directed squarely at Loy's autobiographical subject, Ova. Unlike 'Goy', Loy's poem does not share the task of 'rid[ding] ourselves of our origin' with her general reading audience. The difference between these two versions begins with Loy's treatment of her hybrid subject either as part of a personal history, as in 'Anglo-Mongrels', or as a socio-historical metaphor for her generation, as in 'Goy'. In order to understand Goy's potential as a metaphor, we must examine Loy's own origin as a predecessor to Ova. Critics have written extensively of Loy's optimism and 'valorization' of the 'mongrel'

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<sup>414</sup> Loy, 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose: 1923-1925', *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (Highlands: The Jargon Society, 1982), pp. 146-147. (Hereafter cited as 'Anglo-Mongrels' and *LLB82*).

as a place for the fruitful and creative within her poem.<sup>415</sup> Loy's readers unfailingly recount the 'race drama' that appears, from Loy's autobiographies, to have been central to her upbringing and the development of her adult psyche. According to Loy's biographer Carolyn Burke, Loy's mother was as deeply embarrassed by her Jewish husband's profession—he was a gentleman's tailor and cutter—as she was by his religious heritage. Loy's mother, Julia Lowy, purposely mispronounced the family name, slurring the 'w' to hide its foreignness, and obsessively organised her home and her family's lives to reflect an unerring middle-class Victorian image.<sup>416</sup> A scene from 'Goy' depicts Mrs. Israels as wilfully English:

She is too great an idealist to ever speak the truth and as that which the English do not consider fit to look at has no presence, reality being altogether beneath contempt, she knows that if she draws herself up saying, "Excuse me but our name is Eyes-rails;" or, "Pardon me, my husband is connected with trade" That not another squeek [sic] will she hear from reality.<sup>417</sup>

As I discuss in a later section, Mrs. Israels becomes a stand-in for British imperialism and Victorian propriety. She symbolises the watchfulness of a society guarded by their own sense of being observed and protected by ubiquitous 'eyes' and 'rails'. She falsely declares with pride that her 'husband is connected with trade'. Loy's criticism of Mrs. Israels extends to the late nineteenth-century English society she inhabits.

Loy's father, Sigmund, a mid-nineteenth-century economic immigrant to England, was so strongly a victim of Julia's insecurities and tantrums that he eventually capitulated to fits of hypochondria and nervousness.<sup>418</sup> Loy describes Mr. Israels as an awkward racial stereotype:

If a jew were given the queen of love in marriage, and his children grew wings; not even then could he rid himself of his agonising doubt that the goods have

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<sup>415</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 159.

<sup>416</sup> Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 47.

<sup>417</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folders 27-29, p. 66 of typescript.

<sup>418</sup> Burke, pp. 68-71.

been misrepresented to him. For did not the land flowing with milk and honey turn out to be a stony tract that was hardly arrable [sic]?

Only when his similar slaps him on the back- - Israels - - you made a good bargain there- - do his eyes burn up in feverish releif [sic]; for if it is impossible to get an idea out of his head, he can never make a decision without preludes of reassurances.<sup>419</sup>

Mr. Israels, like his wife, becomes symbolic of his race. In part, Loy's decision to depict her parents as polarised caricatures simplifies the core argument of 'Goy' and (to a lesser extent) 'Anglo-Mongrels'. Ova's mythology also arises from the stand-off between these two warring figures. Loy's interpretation of her parents' characters, which also informs their characterisations in Burke's biography, is not consistent throughout her autobiographies. This perhaps attests to the subjectivity of Loy's representations and supports the argument that the images of her parents should not be read as 'accurate'.

'Anglo-Mongrels' recounts Ova's first years of consciousness and describes her parents' courtship and marriage. Ezra Pound praised 'Anglo-Mongrels' and claimed it was an example of a new form, the 'free-verse novel'.<sup>420</sup> Published first in 1923 in consecutive issues of *The Little Review*, and then as a longer piece in the *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* (1925), 'Anglo-Mongrels' was only made available in its entirety after Loy's death. Since the critical revival of interest in Loy's poetry began in the 1980s, scholars have focused on this poem in numerous studies; its usefulness for critics stems, in part, from the poem's form. A modernist reworking of epic conventions, 'Anglo-Mongrels' has drawn critical comparisons with Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*.<sup>421</sup> Feminist scholars seeking to re-evaluate accepted practices of canonical modernist authors have singled it out for further study. Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Elisabeth Frost have pointed out 'Anglo-Mongrels''s politicised view of class and

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<sup>419</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', p. 48 of typescript.

<sup>420</sup> Ezra Pound's letter to his parents, 21 June 1923, cited in Burke, p. 351. Burke cites J.J. Wilhelm's *Ezra Pound in Paris and London* (University Park: Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 326 as her source.

<sup>421</sup> Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), p. 222. See also Burke, p. 351 for a comparison between Loy and T.S. Eliot.

gender structures and its criticism of British imperialism.<sup>422</sup> I will not reproduce critical readings of ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ here alone. However, ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ and the two versions of Goy’s prose narrative, written ten years later, deserve to be compared. Why did Loy later choose to recast her subject in prose and how do these versions differ from her poem?

Loy’s decision to rename Ova as Goy is highly suggestive. Ova, the plural of Latin ovum, is the biological term for unfertilized eggs.<sup>423</sup> In the section of ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ quoted above, Ova is depicted as nascent; she has arrived into the world with the potential to evolve in response to perceived stimuli. Ova is pluripotent, a blank consciousness that awaits the experiences of consciousness to mould her into the adult she will become. The name Ova also sounds distinctly maternal. She is by virtue of her innate plurality not a single differentiated being and has the potential to become many women at once. The word Goy derives from Hebrew; it is a Jewish designation for a non-Jew.<sup>424</sup> The naming of a non-Jew by a Hebrew speaker distinguishes an outsider from the insider perspective of a cultural group. But in order to refer to someone as a ‘Goy’ the naming person must be part of that group’s knowledge: they must be able to make the distinction from their position on the inside. Loy, herself an echo of Goy, names her half-Jewish, half-Christian subject as someone who belongs in both the naming and the named groups. She identifies herself as a non-Jew by using a Jewish word. The irony of Goy’s naming is amplified by Loy’s choice of the surname ‘Israels’. ‘Israels’ confirms that Goy is, at least through her father’s lineage, a Jew.

If Goy’s name is meant to represent her maternal Christian half, then the name Goy disrupts her familial ties with her father. Under the full name Goy Israels, Loy’s subject can belong to neither the mother nor the father and instead is characterised by

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<sup>422</sup> Elizabeth Frost, *The Feminist Avant-garde in American Poetry* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2003), pp. 36-39. DuPlessis, pp. 160-164.

<sup>423</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, ‘Ova’, <<http://dictionary.oed.com>>.

<sup>424</sup> OED online, ‘Goy’.

her racial division and her rejection as a full member of either religion. Goy, unlike Ova, is semantically cancelled out by the contradiction of her name. Ova, who is never given a last name, offers a greater sense of possibility to the emerging child—that is, until she is ‘fertilised’ and develops a personality in accordance with her surroundings. Ova appears to be at a greater distance from the aggressions of her opposed parents, whereas Goy is born into their religious and historical divide. While it would seem that Ova is a freer being with greater possibilities and that Goy is reduced to her state of internal exile, what is most striking about the differences between these two characters is that Ova lacks agency in moments when Goy wilfully adheres to selfhood.

In a section from ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ entitled ‘Illumination’, Ova’s body and psyche are vague and undifferentiated from her surroundings:

Ova is standing  
alone in the garden

The high skies  
have come gently upon her  
and all their  
steadfast light is shining out of her

She is conscious  
not through her body but through space

This saint’s prize  
this indissoluble bliss  
to be carried like a forgetfulness  
into the long nightmare<sup>425</sup>

Like a prism, Ova momentarily receives the divine light of the ‘high skies’ but does not physically contain it. Her ‘being’ occurs outside her body and her consciousness is not retained by a cohesive self. Ova is a saint-like conduit for an undetermined force, which is akin to Loy’s concept of the ‘electrolife’: a creational spirit that unites humankind.<sup>426</sup> She is ‘carried’ by what has ‘come gently upon her’ but does not act of her own

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<sup>425</sup> Loy, ‘Anglo-Mongrels’, *LLB82*, pp. 163–164.

<sup>426</sup> See Chapter 3 for an explanation of Loy’s idea of the ‘electrolife’.

volition. The word ‘carried’ has a dual connotation: it suggests both the annunciation of the Virgin Mary and Christ’s crucifixion. In following Biblical myth, the saint’s physical burden is to carry the cross and the carrying of god’s incarnation is the ‘saint’s prize’ bequeathed to Mary for her piety. Both are bodily expressions of devotion and purity and the two are each beginning and end to the life of Christ. Ova’s destiny is infused with the melodramatic overtones of these religious scenes. A nearly identical description occurs in the ‘Goy’ typescript on page 3:

One day [Goy] stands alone in the garden—the high skies have come gently upon her and all their steadfast light is shining out of her self.

In illumination her knowledge is clear within her, as in her identity with a conscious universe. She knows herself indestructible, immune—nor is she conscious through her body but through space.

This saint’s-prise—this indissoluble bliss, to be carried like forgetfulness into the long nightmares.<sup>427</sup>

In this version the light shines out of Goy’s ‘self’. While the central idea remains roughly the same in both texts, the insertion of ‘self’ here firmly plants Goy as a concrete figure with her own boundaries of selfhood. The illumination is actively willed and felt: Goy’s ‘knowledge is clear within her, as in her identity with a conscious universe.’ Goy is still conscious through the universal light, yet in this version the light gives her an ‘identity’. She ‘knows herself [to be] indestructible, [and] immune’.

On the same page in ‘Goy’ her parents’ presence is described as ‘an enveloping plasm of uneasiness’.<sup>428</sup> In ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ similar words are used to characterise the heavy influence of the adults, or the ‘big bodies’.<sup>429</sup> However, in ‘Goy’, unlike the poem, Goy’s ‘central impulse is a blind pressure’ and ‘a straining to emerge’.<sup>430</sup> Ova,

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<sup>427</sup> Loy, ‘Goy Israels’, YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 30, p. 3.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Loy, ‘Anglo-Mongrels’, *LLB82*, p. 162.

<sup>430</sup> Loy, ‘Goy Israels’, YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 30, unnumbered page.



under similar scrutiny, merely ‘contract[s]’.<sup>431</sup> In another section of ‘Anglo-Mongrels’, entitled ‘The Surprise’, Ova’s father Exodus tempts her into peeking into a basket of toy Japanese fishes brought as a surprise by a visitor. He then tricks her into lying: “‘We will not tell Miss Bunn’/ says father “what we have done/ peeping into the basket””.<sup>432</sup> Later that evening Ova’s parents and Miss Bunn ask her if she has spoiled the surprise. When she answers ‘no’, as she was instructed, her father reveals gleefully that Ova has lied.<sup>433</sup> Confused by the word ‘liar’, Ova is cast out of the room by the adults and she is portrayed as a pawn of their fickle actions.<sup>434</sup>

Her head expands  
there is nothing  
she knows how to expect from these big bodies  
who hustle her through demeaning duties  
in humiliation  
and without animation<sup>435</sup>

Ultimately she is left to ‘smoulder/ once more/ behind the door’.<sup>436</sup> A handwritten draft of this episode in ‘Goy’ casts Goy’s parents in an even harsher light and figures Goy heroically at the centre of a near-Biblical battle:

When my nurse brought me into the drawing room, the powerful masses of Miss Gunne & my parents were grouped round the fire-place. The Black Bars of the grate with-held a pile of glowing jewels from falling upon their feet while I advanced towards a wall of flame. I could feel these great dark silhouettes as they sat there in the dusk to be concerted in an intention to spring upon me. Their eyes were flashing messages to each other in a code of connivance.

“Goy”, my father asked me, his eye reflected a hot gleam from a burning coal “Did you peep into Auntie Mary’s basket?”

Seeing how Auntie Mary with her finely plaited basket on her knees clutched it with almost convulsive protection on her boney hands, and remembering my pact with my father to spare her feelings, I answered

“No”

As if this word were a signal confidently awaited the upper halves of their bodies bolted out of their huge arm-chairs. The rosy gleam on Miss Gunne’s white hair, the copper edge of my father’s crinkly beard & the embers

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<sup>431</sup> Loy, ‘Anglo-Mongrels’, *LLB82*, p. 164.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162-163.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

in my mother's eye-glasses hung over me as supernatural embodiments of destiny might beam menacing out of an incongruously low sky.<sup>437</sup>

The capitalization of 'Black Bars' and the reiterated hellfire imagery isolate Goy as a victim of an unfair, even evil, agenda. She is fated to incriminate herself and to fall by her creators' design. Although in this heightened and more dramatic revision of 'The Surprise' we do not hear Goy rise to her own defence, there is a stronger separation between Goy and the 'big bodies', conveyed through Goy's retelling. She is clearly not the confused and emotionally detached child in 'Anglo-Mongrels'.<sup>438</sup>

Loy's portrayal of her mother is the same in both the prose and poetic versions.

In 'Goy' Mrs. Israels treats her children as an empress would treat her subjects:

The point of view of Mrs. Israels is that of the British Colonist often sadistic always disdainful; This mother is a Briton colonising the alien attributes of her marriage; her marriage the appropriation of an alien property. [...] These so unserviceable rooms are her dominions; just so much of her grandure. The higgledy piddled[y] contents of the cupboards her national [reserves] [she] guards it and gloats to herself [...]<sup>439</sup>

In 'Anglo-Mongrels', Ada the 'English Rose' is coloniser and colonised body at once:

Early English everlasting  
quadrate Rose  
paradox-Imperial  
trimmed with some travestied flesh  
tinted with bloodless duties dewed  
with Lipton's teas

[...]

A World-Blush  
glowing from  
a never-setting-sun  
Conservative Rose  
storage  
of British Empire-made pot-pourri  
of dry dead men making a sweetened smell

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<sup>437</sup> This page, numbered '13', is one of the few handwritten drafts of 'Goy Israels'. It is worth noting that its use of the first person is unlike the typescript version and is perhaps an earlier prose draft. It is impossible to know whether or not this episode existed in the now fragmented typescript version. See 'Goy Israels: Fragments', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 30.

<sup>438</sup> The 'liar' episode also recurs as Chapter VII of 'Islands' called 'Ethics of Hygiene and Nightmare'. YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 63, pp. 55-84 of typescript (pp. 56-57).

<sup>439</sup> Where this page is damaged and unreadable, I have inserted words in brackets that seem likely to be close to the original.

among a shrivelled collectivity<sup>440</sup>

In 'Anglo-Mongrels', Loy asks: 'And for Empire/ what form could be superior/ to the superimposed/ slivers/ of the rose?'<sup>441</sup> Ada's physical appearance, her piety and her impenetrability all hide her sadistic, even deadly, nature. The imperialist appropriation of the Orient mingles 'Lipton's teas' with the 'pot-pourri' of soldiers' corpses. Ada's household and its décor also mask the expense through which the illusion of a respectable, racially 'pure' family is met. On an unnumbered page in the 'Goy' manuscript, Loy writes:

How shall Mrs. Israels serve as subject for the analysis of an epoch? Will she not falsify the perspective? Where [sic] she Empress or blue-stockings—The least important of her subjects is the microcosm of an Empire. In Mrs. Israels are stirring the dregs of unlimited power.<sup>442</sup>

'Goy' builds on 'Anglo-Mongrels's' portrayal of Loy's mother. The only difference is that Ada speaks in the prose version, at times in dialogue with her daughter. These speeches can best be described as tirades meant to depict the height of Ada's cruelty.

One of the most striking examples in 'Goy' of her mother's censorious voice involves the poem 'The Gnat and the Daisy' (hereafter referred to as 'The Gnat').<sup>443</sup> Mrs. Israels snatches a poem Goy has written away from her and condemns her for the poem's supposed licentiousness. The pages of 'The Gnat' are a remarkable, and perhaps an unintentional, visual representation of her mother's repressiveness. Amy Feinstein suggests that Loy's poem records Goy's voice 'interrupting her mother', and that this interruption is a victory for Goy's 'lofty' 'creative goals'.<sup>444</sup> It seems more likely that

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<sup>440</sup> Loy, 'Anglo-Mongrels', *LLB82*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>442</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 30.

<sup>443</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 28, pp. 49-50 of typescript.

<sup>444</sup> Amy Feinstein, 'Goy Interrupted: Mina Loy's Unfinished Novel and Mongrel Jewish Fiction', *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2, (Summer 2005), pp. 335-353. While I find Feinstein's argument about Jewish symbolism convincing, particularly the figure of the 'English-Jew', I'm not sure that 'Goy' should be read entirely within the framework of what 'can only be called Jewish modernism' (p. 336). Feinstein provides no examples of 'Jewish modernist' texts with which the reader can compare 'Goy'.

Mrs. Israels is 'interrupting', or instead that the two 'voices' in the poem are displaying an interdependency: the naughty child and the repressive mother need each other to coexist. The poem itself is broken into sections and, after each part, the mother's reaction is given (which Loy refers to as 'the interpretation').<sup>445</sup> At some point after the typescript was completed, Loy crossed out the text of the poem and left only Ada's spiteful attack on the page. I reproduce the poem here in its entirety, and restore it before the deletions. Also, I have italicised the poem so that it stands out from the surrounding text:

*The Gnat and the Daisy*

*On a warm afternoon in june*

*AGnat [sic] in the air did fly*

*Ever so high - - - And I'll have you know that you wont get the better of me, if I have to kill you you little fiend. You think you're so devilish smart writing poetry to get*

*Ever so high*

*Round your Father; a pretty thing I declare for a child of your age to write about a wedding; positively immoral! But far be it from you to get down on your knees to God*

*I want a sweetheart was all his cry*

*Ah all his cry*

*for Him to make you a better girl Oh dear me no We can do very well without God or our Mother too for the matter of that.*

*I've asked the white rose*

*But she's far too proud*

*To care for a Gnat like me*

*And what do you think the other day*

*I asked Miss Lily to tea*

*But she, like the Rose*

*Did not care for me.*

*Where on earth's your modesty? You certainly never got such ideas from me. Nice girls never think about weddings until after they're married. God knows my parents brought me up to be pure and industrious I wouldn't have been allowed to waste my time writing such filthy stuff.*

*When low near the ground I flew*

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<sup>445</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 28, pp. 49 of typescript.

*Disconsolately*

My father would have been after me with a birch-rod

*Disconsolately*

And I'm grateful to them; I would shudder

*Ah what did I see?*

To be as evil as you will be when you grow up. You mark my words you'll be  
*Ah what did I see?*

A lost woman—You'll have got what you want when you have brought my grey  
hairs with sorrow to the grave. —But I shant let you! You sit in the morning-  
room and get down to work as you're so mighty ambitious<sup>446</sup>

The manuscript page is torn and it breaks off after these lines. The pages that follow are not thematically consistent with the pages on which this poem is typed and therefore offer no conclusion to this event. Loy has made some additional handwritten alterations besides crossing out the lines of 'The Gnat'. In the upper right corner she has written 'The poem is OK. but not the interpretation'.<sup>447</sup> Across the middle of the page are the words: 'Apply to older poem'. Loy has also handwritten, from memory, part of the missing conclusion of 'The Gnat' in the right margin.<sup>448</sup> The script in which the two notes are written is not the same. 'Apply to older poem' has a larger script than the 'interpretation' quote and is similar to the script in which Loy has written the end of 'The Gnat'. It is difficult to conclude from handwriting analysis alone that the two notes were written at different times. More importantly, one phrase contradicts the other's estimation of the two manuscript pages on which the poem is written. If the poem was 'OK', then why was it crossed out? If Loy was pleased enough with the 'interpretation' to apply it to an 'older poem', then why has she also indicated that she is dissatisfied

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<sup>446</sup> Amy Feinstein's article also reproduces the manuscript version of 'The Gnat and the Daisy'. See Feinstein, pp. 344-345.

<sup>447</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 28, p. 49 of typescript.

<sup>448</sup> On p. 50 of the 'Goy' manuscript, Loy has attempted to complete 'The Gnat' but gives up and concludes with a summary, handwritten in the margin of the typescript: 'I forget the rest, but the petals all having fallen off the daisy when the wedding should have taken place, only [unreadable] the sad end—"and he'. The page is torn and her recollection ends there.

with Ada's demoralising reprimand? Her appraisal of these pages sides either with the mother or with Goy's view of the text. It is clear that the pages could not be left as they were—one text had to cancel the other.

Goy's mother's voice, reproduced around the text of 'The Gnat', interrupts the poem's narrative at crucial moments. Mrs. Israel's attack on her daughter's writing does not limit itself to interpreting the poem's narrative. Loy's own family romance underlies the story of the Gnat's failed romance of the 'Rose'. The twin stories of her mother's moral rejection of her father and of the Gnat's humble (but hopeless) love for the arrogant Rose mix. The poem concludes with the Gnat's marriage to the modest Daisy. Perhaps consciously, Loy recasts Goy as the Daisy who, compared to her mother, is a more suitable match for her father. Mrs. Israel's 'interpretation' of Goy's poem implies that the mother is aware of her daughter's wish to usurp her: Goy is 'devilish smart writing poetry to get round [her] Father'. If the poem and the mother's censorious voice are in dialogue then the page can be read as: 'You think you are so devilish smart writing poetry to get *Ever so high*'. '[D]isconsolately' occurs twice. Its resonance with 'Ah what did I see?' amid Mrs. Israel's censure, 'you'll be *Ah what did I see* A lost woman', intimates that Goy is doomed to become what her mother predicts—a 'vile slut'.<sup>449</sup>

The intertwining of the poem's text with Mrs. Israel's moral condemnations ruptures both the poem's and Goy's implicit innocence. It is tempting to read these manuscript pages as an example of The Voice's influence on Loy's autobiographical writing and to imagine that Loy has internalised her mother's hand and obliterated the poem's offensive text. The suggestion that the incongruous notes about the poem's appropriateness are also the censor's presence manifested on the page is equally convincing. However, the existence of an 'older poem' sheds some doubt on whether

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<sup>449</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israel', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 30, unnumbered page fragment.

these assumptions are justified. Perhaps Loy is referring to a complete version of ‘The Gnat’? No earlier draft of the poem exists in the Loy archive. The only other draft is one included in Chapter Eight of Loy’s novel ‘Islands in the Air’; but judging by the American watermarks found on pages in the ‘Islands’ manuscript, ‘Islands’ was written between ten and twenty years after ‘Goy’.<sup>450</sup> Like ‘Goy’'s incompletely recalled version of ‘The Gnat’, both the handwritten draft and the typescript version in Chapter Eight also summarise the poem’s conclusion as a result of a memory lapse: ‘I remember no more, save that the (g)Nat having found his daisy with all her petals shed, I ended up serenely: So he lay down & died/ At his daisy-stalk’s side’.<sup>451</sup> The romance’s ultimate tragedy and its accompanying pathos are reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*—the interference of parental authority destines the lovers to death.

In the ‘Islands’ version, the poem jumps immediately from the Gnat and the Daisy’s wedding festivities to the bride and groom’s death. Suddenly their happiness is eclipsed and lost in Loy’s written enactment of forgetting the details of their lives. If Loy is positioning herself as the romantic equivalent to her slighted father, she does so to bring them together in eternal sympathy. The statement ‘I ended up serenely’, rather than ‘I ended [‘it’, or ‘the poem’] serenely’, implicates Loy’s childhood self into the poem’s narrative—she is the serene Daisy united by death with the grieving g(N)at. Effectively, Loy steals her father away from her overbearing, disdainful mother. Loy’s characterisation of her father changes dramatically between the prose and poetic versions of her autobiography. ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ begins and ends with Exodus’s story; he is portrayed as the hero of the epic. Exodus’s personality results strongly from his Jewish heritage and from his destined exile:

Exodus                whose initiations  
in arrogance    through brief

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<sup>450</sup> Typed and handwritten drafts of ‘Islands’ are on ‘Cronicon USA’ watermarked paper. I have found examples of this paper from in the Loy archive dating from the 1940s. See Appendix.

<sup>451</sup> Loy, ‘Islands in the Air’, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 67, p. 87.

stimulation of his intellect  
in servitude through early  
ill-usage etch involute  
inhibitions  
upon his sensibility

sharpened and blunted he  
bound for his unformulate  
conception of life  
makes for the harbor  
and the dogged officer of Destiny  
kept Exodus  
and that which he begat  
moving along<sup>452</sup>

According to Burke, Loy's father was forced to take up tailoring after his father's early death and his mother's remarriage. His stepfather discouraged his new son's interest in the arts and in languages.<sup>453</sup> In 'Anglo-Mongrels', Exodus's 'servitude' blunts his intellect and weakens his self-assurance. Yet the reader learns that he quickly became the 'highest paid tailor's cutter' in London and that he made a reasonable fortune.<sup>454</sup> If Exodus suffers any indignity in the poem, it is coupled with his ancestral nobility. He is the 'unperceived/ conqueror of a new world' who lifts his head proudly above the 'alien crowds' and 'paces/ the cancellated desert of the metropolis' to 'get to "the heart of something"'.<sup>455</sup> Although he is a skilled and sensible painter—'He paints/ He feels his pulse'—Loy suggests that his failure as an artist condemns him to hypochondria.<sup>456</sup>

The spiritual tentacles of vanity  
that each puts out towards the culture  
of his epoch knowing not how to find  
and finding not contact he has repealed  
to fumble among his guts

[...]

His body

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<sup>452</sup> Loy, 'Anglo-Mongrels', *LLB82*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>453</sup> Burke, p. 17.

<sup>454</sup> Loy, 'Anglo-Mongrels', *LLB82*, p. 115.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.



Becomes the target of his speculation<sup>457</sup>

Exodus's desire to connect with the British 'culture/ of his epoch' is reduced to the base commonalities of human physiology. Imagined illnesses and a hypersensitive attention to the body root the exiled Jew in the medical offices on Harley Street. His 'pulse' is no longer a sign of inherited genius; instead it connects him to the average citizens of his new home through the body. Described as 'exceedingly beautiful', Exodus is by far the most compelling of all 'Anglo-Mongrels''s characters.<sup>458</sup> The interweaving of Old Testament mythology into the story of her father elevates him to a god-like status. Although there are moments in the poem when her father behaves as unfairly as her mother, Exodus's metaphoric value as an exiled Jew and as an artist who was forced into trade aligns him with his daughter. Interestingly, as Loy completed 'Anglo-Mongrels', she was in the process of developing lampshades and *objets d'art* for commercial purposes in Paris.<sup>459</sup> By casting her father as a natural ally against her mother, Loy was also possibly exploring her congruity with her father in matters of business and as an exile.

In 'Goy', Mr. Israel is a far more vulnerable and frail creature. Responding to Mrs. Israel's tyrannical behaviour, he advises his daughter:

"What you must do" commands the whispering derelict "is to make up your mind that your mother although mark you a perfectly nice woman; in one respect, just happens to be mad. She raves. What of it? Why let yourself be made so miserable." Urges the father with his trembling hands; imploring because incapable of protecting his harrassed [sic] child.

[...]

"But my head! My head!"<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>459</sup> Burke, pp. 349-360.

<sup>460</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israel', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 28, unnumbered page.

Mr. Israels has been driven to illness, or made to feign illness, by Mrs. Israels herself. 'Goy' presents both parents retreating to their nervous instabilities out of their desire for sympathy. Goy's father does not equip her with the means to negotiate her dual nature. If Goy is an internalisation of her parents' inherent hatred for each other, then her father's weakness leaves her the victim of her mother's control. He weakly 'commands' his daughter to capitulate to Mrs. Israels's irrationality. In another section of 'Goy', Mr. Israels's racial heritage is described:

Mr. Israels is an unbeliever; he considers that his God has done enough for him. He had brought nothing out of the holy land or so he thinks: only a pedigree trailing back into the past for over a thousand years, of an aristocracy become immune to degeneration, because divested of all mundane prerogatives it is forced to preserve itself in it's [sic] intellect.<sup>461</sup>

Mr. Israels seems to have little appreciation for his own Jewish 'pedigree'. Surprisingly, he is also consciously unaware of his religion's teachings:

Having sacked the scriptures he still, *unknowingly*, defer [sic] to their dictation in straining every sinew of his soul to urge and aid his children to enter the promised land; imposing the obligation of his pedigree upon them—to inherit the earth.<sup>462</sup> [My emphasis]

Mr Israels's knowledge of the scriptures is genetically ingrained into him. Loy originally typed 'deforms' where 'defer' occurs in the final text. Both physical deformity and emotional infirmity are characteristic of Mr. Israels and signal not only his own decline but the decline of the entire 'race' of his ancestors and his children. But he is not entirely artless. Loy writes about Mr. Israels's self-preserving motives for marrying his wife:

A pedigree without pollution until, with a devious expedience for preservation; like a cuckoo's egg, thinking to promote it half-way on the road to salvation, he laid his progeny in a protestant nest.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folders 27-29, p. 41 of typescript.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

Unlike Exodus, Mr. Israel is deeply calculating and has no regard for the ‘purity’ of his lineage. His greater interest is cleverly to guarantee his children’s salvation by raising them as Christians. The father’s exhortation ‘to inherit the earth’ stems from his belief in the superiority of his progeny. His commands come from a far deeper source than his own personality. He is speaking here in prophetic, Biblical tones. Loy writes that ‘the children can not [sic] breathe for long in the same room with the promise of the father; for this heritage is not for their enjoyment—but is a fulfilment of duty’.<sup>464</sup> The Mr. Israel of ‘Goy’ is older than the Exodus of ‘Anglo-Mongrels’, whom we see first from boyhood. Yet Loy’s general philosophising about the Jews and her analysis of her father in ‘Goy’ meld together—she is making an example of her father, he embodies the qualities of his race. In ‘Goy’, Loy writes:

If a Jew were given the queen of love in marriage, and his children grew wings; not even then could he rid himself of this agonising doubt that the goods have been misrepresented to him. For did not the land flowing with milk and honey turn out to be a stony tract that was hardly arable?

Only when his similar slaps him on the back

--Israel--you made a good bargain there

--do his eyes burn up in feverish relief [sic]; for if it is impossible to get an idea out of his head, he can never make a decision without preludes of reassurances.<sup>465</sup>

Loy argues that some old deception, suffered by Mr. Israel’s people, has caused his ‘agonising doubt’ about being cheated. Familiar prejudices take on an historical, nearly scientific logic. The Jews’ desire for success arises from an ongoing persecution:

Is it the view-point of a race that having only a borrowed horizon, keeps sharper outlook; or of a people whose temple having been overthrown, has developed a mania for building things up—fortunes—families—?<sup>466</sup>

Believing they are the ‘chosen race’, the Jews are victim to other races whose ‘choice implies conservation’ and that ‘exterminat[es]’ those ‘exempt from this profitable

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

election'.<sup>467</sup> Mr. Israel's drive and his obsession with money and the 'market value' of his daughters alienate him from Goy. Although Goy's father guarantees his children a 'freedom of intellect' and encourages the study of music, art and literature, Loy argues that he sees women as the 'Jew' sees them: 'woman is somewhat of the nature of impurity—something that must not be let out of sight lest it confirm itself'.<sup>468</sup> Loy's treatment of race as a totalising concept springs from a polarisation of her parents' ideals and behaviours. Her eugenicist grouping together of races, determination of racial 'traits' and her theory of 'race memory' also respond to the time in which 'Goy' was written, between World War I and World War II, as the Nazi regime was expanding across Europe.

Both 'Anglo-Mongrels' and 'Goy' dramatise Loy's autobiographical narrative differently. The positioning of the hero Exodus in 'Anglo-Mongrels' as an antecedent to the author herself is telling, particularly through its manipulation of the epic tradition. In the poem's penultimate section, Ova is described as the 'child of Exodus', born into a legacy of emigration:

So this child of Exodus  
With her heritage of emigration  
often  
'sets out to seek her fortune'  
in her turn  
trusting to terms of literature  
dodging the breeders' determination  
not to return 'entities sent on consignment'  
by their maker Nature  
except in a condition  
of moral  
effacement'<sup>469</sup>

Unlike her father's fortune, Ova's is built on writing. The 'terms' of her success are not profitability but a creativity that can only exist away from the imposed morality of her parents. Ova's heroism is inherited from her father's race, and although she must

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>469</sup> Loy, 'Anglo-Mongrels', *LLB82*, pp. 170-171.

ultimately shed their influence in order to write, she is indebted to Exodus for her ability to break away from her mother. Conversely, Mr. Israel is unable to protect his child or himself from Mrs. Israel's oppressive control. He is not a character with whom Goy can align herself in her struggle for mental freedom; his promises of grandeur are impossible to fulfil. Loy's poem 'Hilarious Israel' (1947), published twenty years after she composed 'Anglo-Mongrels' and 'Goy', was written in reaction to a Yiddish theatre company in New York.<sup>470</sup>

Phoenix of Exodus  
on whose morgue-nest  
mortgage forever forecloses

Arise out of massacre  
messiah  
of our amusement.

Across prosceniums  
your olden torture  
pays gushing premiums  
of laughter.<sup>471</sup>

Burke points out that Loy's 'Phoenix of Exodus' refers directly both to the 'cerebral master of ceremonies' of the Yiddish theatre and to Loy herself.<sup>472</sup> Death, 'morgue-nest', and a history of 'martyrdom' and 'torture' describe the Jew's stage; Loy writes of the Jewish entertainers that 'History inclines to you/ as a dental surgeon/ over the sufferer's chair'. The poem's criticism of the theatre group is that the history of Jewish exclusion and persecution, both in the Old Testament and in the early twentieth century, is being amplified and exploited by the performers to 'delight' their 'foe[s]'.<sup>473</sup> Burke's reading of 'Hilarious Israel' as Loy 'speaking to a part of herself' seems to rely on

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<sup>470</sup> Burke, p. 413.

<sup>471</sup> Loy, 'Hilarious Israel', *LLB82*, pp. 207-208.

<sup>472</sup> Burke, p. 413.

<sup>473</sup> Loy, 'Hilarious Israel', *LLB82*, pp. 207-208.

Loy's evocation of Exodus, the pseudonym she used for her father.<sup>474</sup> Beyond this, I see no obvious evidence for a troubled identification with the Jewish performers. It is possible that the harshness of the lines 'Has self-sought anaesthesia/ dazed you/ into theatrical lairs' and 'Magnet to maniac/ misfortune' is directed partly at Loy's bi-spirited self. Perhaps Loy means to suggest that each 'half', the Jew and the gentile, is engaged in a performance of racial identity, which the other half must watch. The staging of Loy's mixed heritage in her writing requires the internal, polar divide of race to define her 'Jewish' and 'Christian' qualities. This dialectical relationship underlies the judgements Loy makes in 'Hilarious Israel' of the Jewish performers and their non-Jewish audience.

One possible reason for the difference between 'Goy' and 'Anglo-Mongrels' is that 'Anglo-Mongrels''s epic form and its Biblical references require a genealogy of exile, and that the glorification of origins is central to Loy's statements about the creative possibilities of the immigrant. 'Goy' may also be a downplaying of origins, instead focusing on the uniqueness of Goy's hybridity: she is self-originating and hence 'new'. Burke refers to 'Anglo-Mongrels' as a 'modernist verse epic' and as an 'autobiographical epic'.<sup>475</sup> Yet, she does not explain how 'Anglo-Mongrels' befits the label 'modernist epic' or how it fits historically into the epic tradition. However, certain characteristics associable with the epic form are retained by 'Anglo-Mongrels'. The poem's hero, Exodus, is involved in a (albeit short) journey and he is wandering through hostile territory in the form of a xenophobic British society. Although no obvious element of the supernatural is involved, as in *Paradise Lost* or Homeric epic, readers sense the significance of Exodus's trials and his successes take on cosmic importance. A high level of formal detail introduces each character, especially Exodus

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<sup>474</sup> Burke, p. 413.

<sup>475</sup> Burke, p. 16 and p. 338. Also, for an analysis of 'Anglo-Mongrels' and Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, see Peter Nicholls', *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, p. 222.

and Ada, who is glorified as ‘Early English everlasting/ quadrate Rose/ paradox-Imperial...’<sup>476</sup> ‘Goy’ also follows the traditions of the Bildungsroman, although its heavy-handed treatises on race edge out a substantial part of the childhood narrative. Another possible reason lies in Loy’s move from verse to prose. Goy is described as ‘a wanderer infinitely more haunted than the eternal jew: a bi-spirited entity; to wander in opposite directions at once’.<sup>477</sup> This ‘bi-spirited entity’ becomes the focus of the prose version, rather than Exodus, and is clearly Loy’s overriding interest as she rewrites her narrative in subsequent versions. Of the Jew’s suffering, Loy writes in ‘Goy’:

The purely mental heroism of the Jew has been of opposite import to all other national invincibilities [sic]. It consists in his will to live.

So [Mr] Israels like all who are unavailing resorts to prophecy [:] “Remember, my darling, that those who suffer most are to be the happiest in the end.”<sup>478</sup>

Goy inherits Exodus’s prophetic promise of the Jew’s prosperity as well as his ‘will to live’. However, it is clear that prophecy arises out of desperation and requires suffering and failure. At the same time as Loy was writing ‘Goy’, she also composed the fictional dialogue ‘Mi and Lo’, which she sent to her son-in-law Julien Levy.<sup>479</sup> ‘Mi and Lo’ is a brief Socratic exchange on the nature of art and existence. It is ‘Mi[na] Lo[y]’ acting out both sides of her heritage on the page.<sup>480</sup> In ‘Mi and Lo’ Loy appears to be interrogating the assumption that failure leads to the ultimate reward of ‘happiness’.<sup>481</sup> Ultimately, Loy exchanges the amorphous and impressionable Ova for the more concrete figure, Goy. It seems likely that as Loy’s focus changed from explaining her parents’ histories to illuminating her childhood and adolescent consciousness, her

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<sup>476</sup> Loy, ‘Anglo-Mongrels’, *LLB82*, p. 121. In order to define epic convention in ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ I have referred to M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms: Seventh Edition* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999), pp. 76-78.

<sup>477</sup> Loy, ‘Goy Israels’, YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 28, p. 41.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>479</sup> Burke, pp. 376-377.

<sup>480</sup> Loy, ‘Mi and Lo’, YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 166.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*

parents increasingly became one-dimensional. ‘Goy’'s condensed, extreme caricatures of Loy's parents allow Goy's consciousness to project its own voice in the prose.

In 2005, a previously unavailable manuscript from Julien Levy's estate was donated to the Beinecke library. It is not included in the Mina Loy archive, even though Loy is its author. It became accessible to readers in June 2006, after conservation work was completed, and is currently catalogued in ‘General Collection Manuscript Miscellany’. This collection is ongoing. It consists of recent acquisitions that have not been processed and includes papers for which there is no existing author's archive. They are subdivided and listed by author and should therefore appear in a manuscript database search under an author's name.<sup>482</sup> However, in Loy's case, this new manuscript is not listed as one of Loy's writings; any scholar searching for her papers would normally be unaware of its existence (unless they knew to specifically check these miscellany folders). For this reason, it is unlikely that it has been seen by many studying Loy's archive. The Loy manuscript is a signed and dated draft of ‘Goy Israels: A Play of Consciousness’ (1932) (hereafter referred to as ‘Goy 32’).<sup>483</sup> It is the only manuscript of Loy's autobiographical prose to which she assigned a definite date for an entire draft.

‘Goy 32’ is unlike the other ‘Goy’ version among Loy's papers. It is far shorter than the ‘Goy’ typescript; it consists of only 37 handwritten pages. ‘Goy 32’ does not include a discussion of race or the race history of the Jews and the Christians. And unlike ‘Goy’, very little information about Goy's parents is given—we see them appear peripherally as agents of change in the child's consciousness. Most significantly, ‘Goy 32’ does not address the religious hybridity of its subject. Although readers would have recognised Goy's Jewish blood because of her surname, her heritage is never

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<sup>482</sup> Email correspondence with Patricia C. Willis, curator of YCAL and the Mina Loy Papers.

<sup>483</sup> Loy, ‘Goy Israels: A Play of Consciousness’, YCAL MSS MISC, group 606, item F-1. (Hereafter cited as ‘Goy 32’).



acknowledged openly in the text. The two 'Goy' narratives also differ structurally. On the back of a misplaced page from the 'Goy' manuscript, Loy has written:

See the whole of the story of the Israels together—no summary—write incidents[.]  
History of family who does nothing is inexhaustible—we get impatient turning out the sag bag and dump all the last in a lump—<sup>484</sup>

This note suggests that 'Goy's' racial drama is not only insufficient but also dull for the reader and for the author herself. Judging from 'Goy 32', her parents' histories are no longer central to Goy's own story. Although it maintains the third-person narrative of both 'Anglo-Mongrels' and 'Goy', 'Goy 32' focuses exclusively on the child's emerging consciousness. According to another of Loy's note fragments: 'The self is a decomposition of the whole—the whole—the composite origin of our experience. Let us meditate on the nature of our experience'.<sup>485</sup> In 'Goy 32', Goy's origins are not founded on the inherited frustrations or the will of her parents; Loy has relocated the origin of the self in an individual's 'experience'.<sup>486</sup> Goy comes into the world clean, and does not begin to form her 'self' until a series of formative 'incidents' occur. Another note builds on Loy's theory of blankness at birth:

If man, at times appears infinite in his suffering, infantesimal [sic] in his satisfactions—it is because of his inability to retrace himself to his origin. His being a covered entrance to infinity—making him inwardly illimitable—owing to this inability—fills his inward dimension with vaporous frustration of which a great majority are aware. His person the televisual projection of a wavelength from infinity—apparently all he is, being in reality the picture of his impact with the screen of human consciousness.<sup>487</sup>

The benefit of tracing one's origins, defined here as the incipience of consciousness, is to find 'infinity' through one's self. This infinity is Loy's concept of the 'electrolife' and what it guarantees is connection to a collective human consciousness and to God.

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<sup>484</sup> This page is numbered '103' and clearly is the missing page 103 of the 'Goy' manuscript. It is currently located in an 'unidentified fragments' folder of the Goy manuscript (box 2, folder 30).

<sup>485</sup> Loy, 'Goy 32', YCAL MSS MISC.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> Loy, 'History of Religion and Eros', YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 158. In Chapter Three I discuss the 'modernness' of this section further.

Loy argues that a being's origins must be believed to be greater than its own personal histories, its suffering and its satisfactions, if one is to understand one's own nature.<sup>488</sup> In another note, Loy writes that the 'inward dimension' is the 'fifth dimension', an idea espoused by the turn-of-the-century Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli.<sup>489</sup> He claimed that through creativity man could attain a higher consciousness.<sup>490</sup> Loy, too, thought that this dimension was where genius resides and was the source of great art and literature.

Loy's exploration of her own genius, not as the nullified bi-spirited Goy of 'Goy Israels' but as the inquisitive, nearly divine child in 'Goy 32', consists of a series of events. The subtitle, 'A Play of Consciousness', seems misleading at first. This version is not written in the form of a dramatic 'play', though it entices the reader with a staged sequence of scenes in rapid succession. Loy's subtitle resonates on many levels: the nature of the child consciousness is to be revealed much like a 'play' of light or colour on a screen. The rapid and intermittent shifts of thought and stimuli impact on the page in a dazzling free-flowing account. Her 'play of words' may also be a kind of joke-play or a jest, not in the form of trickery, but as a rhetorical clue that what the reader is about to experience is in fact an adult mind recalling a child's impressions through the elongated lens of its memory. Whichever way we interpret Loy's use of the word 'play' to describe 'Goy 32', it is clear that she has raised the rhetorical effect in this revision beyond a summary of supposedly remembered facts and details.

What is most immediately obvious about 'Goy 32' is that this manuscript is nearly identical to the first four chapters of Loy's 'The Child and the Parent' (hereafter referred to as 'Child').<sup>491</sup> With a few alterations, 'Goy 32' reads as a first draft of

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Burke, pp. 146-147.

<sup>491</sup> Loy, 'The Child and the Parent', Chapters 3-4, YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folders 11-12. (Hereafter cited as 'Child'). Also, 'Islands', Chapters 1-2, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folders 59-60.

‘Child’. The two most significant differences between ‘Goy 32’ and ‘Child’ are that Loy has included Goy’s name both in the title of the manuscript and once in the narrative itself. Goy’s parents are also occasionally mentioned by name as Mr. and Mrs. Israels. Otherwise the language and chapter headings in ‘Goy 32’ and ‘Child’ are the same. Loy has carefully placed an ‘X’ in the manuscript’s margins next to parts of ‘Goy 32’ that were left out of the archive’s ‘Child’ typescript. This confirms that ‘Goy 32’ is in fact an earlier draft of ‘Child’. The appearance of ‘Goy 32’ offers clues about Loy’s autobiographical practice and hints at a possible timeline for her multiple revisions.

In her biography of Loy, Burke suggests that ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ was begun in Berlin in the winter of 1922.<sup>492</sup> The first section was published in the spring of 1923 in *The Little Review* and the subsequent sections were included in Robert McAlmon’s *Contact Collection* in 1925.<sup>493</sup> During these years, Loy moved from Berlin back to Paris after many of her fellow artists had left the city fearing the rise of political tensions in Germany. The best possible assignable period for ‘Goy’ is that it was written some time after ‘Anglo-Mongrels’ was drafted and during the years before Loy left Paris for New York in 1936.<sup>494</sup> The watermark on many of ‘Goy’’s manuscript pages, ‘Conqueror Typewriting’, is not traceable to an exact date. However, the only example I have found of this type of paper is in an undated letter written in Paris most likely during the 1930s. Loy operated her lampshade shop between the years 1926 and 1928. Some notes and drafts of ‘Goy’ are written on letterhead from Loy’s shop. It is possible that Loy worked on her autobiographies while her shop was in operation, but it is more likely that she worked on them seriously after 1928.<sup>495</sup> She was writing intermittently during those four years. There are a few dated poem drafts existing from that time such as ‘Lady

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<sup>492</sup> Burke, pp. 349-356.

<sup>493</sup> Roger L. Conover, ‘Appendices’, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), pp. 233-234.

<sup>494</sup> Burke, p. 385.

<sup>495</sup> See Appendix for a possible chronology of Loy’s autobiographical prose.

Laura of Bohemia' (which was likely written in 1925 and that Loy sent to her daughter in 1927) and 'The Widow's Jazz' (which was read aloud at Natalie Barney's Paris salon in the same year).<sup>496</sup> If Loy had already developed an early draft of 'Child' in 1932, in the form of the Goy 'play', then did she write the longer version 'Goy' before, after or while 'Goy 32' was being written?

It is impossible to know with any certainty in what order 'Goy' and 'Goy 32' were written. Simply because Loy used her shop's letterhead in some page fragments, it does not necessarily follow that 'Goy' was drafted during the time the shop was open. She may have used the leftover letterhead as scrap paper. What is significant is that 'Goy' clearly points back to 'Anglo-Mongrels'. The use of the poem's exact wording implies that 'Goy' was intended to be a fleshed-out prose version. 'Goy 32', which may have been written during the same time as 'Goy' or slightly after, is ultimately the version that Loy used as the basis for her two later autobiographies, which I discussed in Chapter Three. Additionally, there is a danger in privileging 'Child' and 'Islands in the Air' (1940s) over Goy's story simply because 'Goy 32' suggests the abandonment of Loy's interest in the 'race drama'. Yet, the chronology and its implications about Loy's writing practices in an atmosphere of increasing anti-Semitism in Paris cannot be overlooked.

Alex Goody's essay, in a collection on Jewish British women authors, compares 'Anglo-Mongrels' with 'Goy'.<sup>497</sup> Goody refers to 'Goy' in her essay title but does not reproduce any excerpts from the manuscript. Instead, she includes two quotations that refer to a Jewish grandmother from Loy's later autobiographical manuscript 'Islands in the Air'. Goody's assumption that 'Islands' and 'Goy' equally conceptualise Jewishness is problematic. 'Goy' depicts Loy writing as an intruder and focuses on her exclusion

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<sup>496</sup> Burke, p. 361.

<sup>497</sup> Alex Goody, "'Goy Israels' and the 'nomadic embrace': Mina Loy Writing Race' in *"In the open": Jewish women writers and British culture*, ed. by Claire M. Tylee (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), pp. 129-146.

caused by racial hybridity. 'Islands' skirts the issue of race; it is less willing to label, or in fact to 'name', its protagonist. Goody claims that 'Goy', like 'Anglo-Mongrels', 'deploy[s] stereotypes of "the Jew"' and is concerned with 'racialism which has its origins in nineteenth-century pseudoscience'.<sup>498</sup> Yet, her tendency to read all of Loy's writing, poetry and autobiographical prose, as reflective of an unchanging concept of Jewishness ignores Loy's complex and varying engagement with her own 'racial' heritage. Rightly, Goody asserts that 'the mainstream of Loy criticism' ignores the possible 'relationship of [Loy's] racial identity to her modernist writing'.<sup>499</sup> The current critical focus on Loy as a marginalised feminist or as a proto-feminist should be expanded to include Loy's many direct and indirect writings on race and religion.

'Goy 32' ends:

Since she has begun to show off a little—she is nothing more than an actor on our own stage, but had we while she was yet something nebulous and absolute, been able to get into touch with the child microcosm, we might have found in this seedling of all Evolution not only the reflorescence of the past, but also a germination of the intimate blossom of consciousness, and that in the cyclic manner of secret things in which the end is in the beginning that it starts its unfoldment [sic] right under our unparticipating eyes in a flashing synopsis of the eventual illumination of man, as if will were the urge of evolution to arrive through a patient voyage of elucidation at the point of departure, only this time by light of our own reason.<sup>500</sup>

Loy argues for a return to that 'intimate blossom of [the child's] consciousness' that is untainted by one's knowledge and experience of selfhood. Before an individual is differentiated, it is a template for all man's evolutionary history. 'Goy 32' provides the way back from the modern world and it glorifies the nascent child as the ideal state of being. Loy's autobiographical writing hinges on this ability to arrive at personal illumination by a shedding of personal history. She struggles with her own childhood memories and with the memories of her parents; they obscure the pure infant

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<sup>498</sup> Goody, p. 142.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>500</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', YCAL MSS MISC.

consciousness that Loy sees as the pinnacle of embodiment, in particular for the artist. Her socio-political essays, such as 'International Psycho-Democracy' (1918), present a plan for the psychic and social amelioration of society:

The destructive element in collective consciousness induced by inhibitive social and religious precepts that ordain that man must suffer and cause to suffer and deny the validity of Man's fundamental desires, has resulted in Cosmic Neurosis, whose major symptom is Fear.

This fear takes the form of international suspicion and the resulting national protective-phobias.

Our enlightened psychological principles put an end to Cosmic Neurosis.<sup>501</sup>

Pacifism, the destruction of the class system and the perfection of self are all objectives that can be met through the use of human imagination. Loy's formula for social improvement depends on 'psychic evolution' and a return to pure 'intuition'.<sup>502</sup> Her response to the international climate of change brought about by World War I was to base her social polemics on the real or imagined illuminations of her own 'nebulous' consciousness. Ultimately, she believed that the modern world must revisit its personal and collective histories in order to reverse the effect of outdated tradition and racial prejudice. Ova, Goy and finally the nameless 'child' embody Loy's prototypical modern Man under the guise of her own life story.

A verse fragment located in the 'Goy' manuscript's 'unidentified fragments' folder reads:

Moral Philosophy  
is the long and arduous distracted and distracting analysis  
of the Good and Evil complex in Man—

I have laid bare to you your inhibition  
O races of the earth  
Is it unseemly to you that instantly  
I presume to undo the work of centuries?<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Loy, 'International Psycho-Democracy', *LLB82*, pp. 276-282 (p. 279).

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>503</sup> Loy has handwritten 'Goy Israels' in the margin on this typed and dated page. Although this verse fragment is dated '1921', it does not confirm that 'Goy' was being written during that year. No other part of this poem survives and its origin is unknown.

In Chapter Six, I address Loy's privileging of genius and its connection to 'race memory'. As Loy's autobiographies were revised and rewritten, the central 'child' character developed an increasingly prophetic voice. I will explore the extent of Loy's investment in the genius figure and her grandiose claim that the purpose of her autobiographies was to 'undo the work of centuries'.

## Chapter Five

### 'Colossus' and the Myth of Arthur Cravan

I would like to be in Vienna and Calcutta,  
Catch every train and every boat  
Lay every woman and gorge myself on every dish.  
Man of fashion, chemist, whore, drunk, musician, labourer, painter, acrobat,  
actor;  
Old man, child, crook, hooligan, angel and rake; millionaire, bourgeois, cactus,  
giraffe, or crow;  
Coward, hero, negro, monkey, Don Juan, pimp, lord, peasant, hunter,  
industrialist,  
Flora and fauna:  
I am all things, all men and all animals!  
What next?  
Assume a distinguished air,  
Manage to leave behind perhaps  
My fatal plurality!<sup>504</sup>

When Arthur Cravan disappeared and was presumed dead in 1918, he left an equally illustrious list of 'occupations': 'poet, professor, boxer, dandy, flâneur, forger, critic, sailor, prospector, card sharper, lumberjack, bricoleur, thief, editor [and] chauffeur'.<sup>505</sup> His 'plurality' wilfully annihilated any fixable identity. Although his desire to be 'all men' and 'all things' was not in itself 'fatal', his obsessive recasting and his self-mythologizing make it impossible to trust the many 'facts' of Cravan's short life. Almost immediately after his death, at the age of 31, he was subsumed into the successive 'isms' gaining currency during the early twentieth century: first, Cravan was named a proto-Dadaist, and their patron saint, and later his life and work was written into the lineage of surrealism by André Breton. Rumours that he had staged his death and produced forgeries, paintings, and poetry under various pseudonyms persist today.<sup>506</sup> Cravan's afterlife and his iconicity are as authentic as any 'record' of his life; the man of 'all things' figure we have historically inherited is implausible and

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<sup>504</sup> Arthur Cravan, 'Hie!', trans. by Paul Lenti, in *4 Dada Suicides*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (London: Atlas Press, 2005), p. 42. Originally published in *Maintenant*, issue 2 (1913). (Hereafter cited as *4 Dada*).

<sup>505</sup> Cravan, 'Hie!', *4 Dada*, p. 12.

<sup>506</sup> Charles Nicholl, 'The Wind Comes Up Out of Nowhere', *London Review of Books*, 28 (March 2006), 8-13 (p. 8).



appealingly overblown. His self-splintering disintegrates into a masquerade of all-consuming changeability. For this reason it is fitting that Cravan could be subsumed into the aesthetics of Dadaism and surrealism. Both movements meant to shatter expectations about the relationship between the art object and its audience. Cravan's life and his antics, perhaps more than his actual writing, had a useful brutality for those wishing to shock with an aesthetic about face.

The blurring of Cravan's life with his art seems inevitable because both were equally ephemeral and fantastic. The question of whether he did or did not die in 1918 invariably induces a forensic re-examination of what little is documented about his life. Most scholars begin '[b]orn Fabian Avenarius Lloyd in Lausanne, Switzerland, on May 22, 1887, he was the son of Otho Holland Lloyd, whose sister Constance Mary Lloyd was Oscar Wilde's wife'.<sup>507</sup> Although these are 'hard facts', Cravan never published under his given name, and had accumulated so many fake passports and identities that he could comfortably pose as German, Swiss, French, and English with utter fluency.<sup>508</sup> In a recently published American anthology, Cravan is mistakenly described as an 'American poet'.<sup>509</sup> This is a particularly humorous error, especially when one reads Cravan's 1913 essay 'To Be or Not to Be...American':

Today [...] everyone is American. It is essential to be American, or at least to look like you are one, which is exactly the same thing. Everyone does. It is the only way to be fashionable. Everyone does, I tell you, from the most miserable wretches to the most extravagant fops.<sup>510</sup>

Cravan clearly understood the benefits of camouflage and yet his 'praise' of the American seems ironically sarcastic. Cravan's writing cannot be mined for the author's

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<sup>507</sup> Roger L. Conover, 'Mina Loy's "Colossus": Arthur Cravan Undressed', in *New York Dada*, ed. by Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), pp. 102-104, (p. 103). (Hereafter cited as *NYD*). I do not take into account a (difficult to find) biography of Cravan written in Spanish by Maria Lluïsa Borràs called *Arthur Cravan* (1993).

<sup>508</sup> Conover, *NYD*, p.102, and Nicholl, p. 8.

<sup>509</sup> *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*, ed. by David Lehman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 273. In addition to mistaking Cravan's nationality, Lehman also misspells Loy's original surname 'Lowy', as 'Lowry'.

<sup>510</sup> Cravan, 4 *Dada*, p. 29. Originally appeared in *L'Echo des Sports*, 10 June 1909.

intent; 'Arthur Cravan' refers to one who not only changed voices, but who intentionally undermined and satirised the concept of a single, consistent author. He has come to represent an idea, a mode of behaviour, a type of writing, rather than a person or an individual poet.

Still, scholars writing about Cravan are obliged to partake in hagiography by recounting all that is known about his life: those infamous labours that are an essential part of the Cravan myth. Some examples of these mythic details are listed here. Between the years 1903 and 1917, he travelled across America and lived in Berlin, Paris and Barcelona before sailing to New York in 1917. After arriving fresh from a fight with Jack Johnson (Cravan lasted six rounds), he met up with the American art patron Walter Arensberg and the artist Marcel Duchamp through his existing friendship with the Spanish writer Francis Picabia. In Paris, Cravan had brought out five issues of his little magazine, *Maintenant*, which in three short years had allegedly 'offended virtually every artist of standing in Paris'.<sup>511</sup> Within a year of arriving in New York, Cravan delivered a lecture before the Independents Exhibition, during which he drunkenly began to strip off his clothes and to swear at the assembled crowd. The result was a *succès de scandale* that brought Cravan's already reputed dynamism to the attention of New York's literati. Avoiding conscription in 1917, Cravan eventually found his way to Mexico, where he opened a boxing school, the Escuela de Cultura Fisica. Cravan was last seen trying to make his way alone via boat eventually to Buenos Aires from the coast of Mexico.<sup>512</sup> Since his death, a few unlikely candidates for his possible afterlife have been singled out: the mysterious forger Dorian Hope and B. Traven are among them.<sup>513</sup> Various sightings and tantalising linkages pepper the haunting inexplicability of Cravan's disappearance, and the fact that no trace of his body was ever found had the

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<sup>511</sup> Conover, *NYD*, p. 103. All references to the details of Cravan's life in this paragraph are from this source.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Nicholl, p. 8 and p. 13.

effect of sublimating his once towering presence (quite literally, he measured 6'4") into an all-encompassing myth.<sup>514</sup> The aesthetics imposed by those who have built our image of Cravan inevitably taint any attempt to work back through the myth to assess his writing. Cravan's readers have had to take him at his 'word'—that is to say, the image that his writing portrays—as the devouring wanderer who 'gorge[s]' himself on what the world has to offer. Yet, how has this 'word' been edited, manipulated or variously released by those with an interest in Cravan's 'modernity'?

This Chapter will examine the competing images of Cravan's (now mythical) voracity. His appetite, his physical strength and his sexuality all factor into 'the modern individual [who] is assumed to be an autonomous male free of familial and communal ties'.<sup>515</sup> In *The Gender of Modernity* (1995), Rita Felski challenges the idea that 'modernity' is, among other things, an inherently masculine 'revolt against the tyranny of authority'.<sup>516</sup> Certainly, the outward impression of Cravan's extreme masculinity has a basis in his prose and poetry. However, the fecundity of his (dead or living) body and the generative aspect of his masculinity—a brutal 'knock out' of tradition—lures Cravan's image back from simplified polarities of 'male' destructiveness. Cravan's art relies heavily on his becoming the art 'object', a spectacle of newness for the consumption of an (often live) audience. Any approach to Cravan's work must also be wary of drawing conclusions about the 'actual person' portrayed in his writing.

Among those who wrote about him was his wife, Mina Loy. Cravan and Loy met in 1917 at an Arensberg Party in New York. Details of their courtship and marriage in Mexico City in 1918 are found in Loy's unpublished prose manuscript, 'Colossus'. 'Colossus' was written after Cravan's disappearance, and most likely begun in the early 1920s when Loy returned from her brief sojourn in South America (waiting for Cravan

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<sup>514</sup> Nicholl, p. 8.

<sup>515</sup> Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

to appear) to live in Paris. Portions of ‘Colossus’ were published in 1986, as part of a collection of essays on the Dadaist movement in New York, *New York Dada*. They were selected from a larger manuscript privately held by the ‘leading Anglophone Cravaniste’ Roger Lloyd Conover.<sup>517</sup> Conover is also the executor of Loy’s literary estate and he has edited the only two widely circulated collections of Loy’s poetry. He is currently writing a long-awaited biography of Cravan.<sup>518</sup> Conover writes in his introduction to the selections from ‘Colossus’:

One of [Loy’s unpublished prose works], *Colossus*, is a thinly disguised roman à clef or series of prose “newsreels” about her life with Arthur Cravan. As an intimate profile by his wife, this is probably as accurate a psychological profile of Cravan as anyone has written, and it is the only piece of writing on him that dwells on his emotional life as opposed to his public behavior. To enhance the advantage of Mina Loy’s unique perspective, I have chosen excerpts which offer a view of Cravan’s private, offstage existence; Cravan the Performer has been featured in every other profile written.<sup>519</sup>

Conover’s intimate knowledge of Cravan’s and Loy’s writing and life influences the title of his introduction: ‘Mina Loy’s “Colossus”: Arthur Cravan Undressed’. Conover asserts that Loy knew the ‘real’ Arthur Cravan, and not just the staged version conveyed by his writing and his performances. Conover’s assumption extends to Loy’s own intentions while writing ‘Colossus’. He imagines that she presented Cravan in an ‘accurate’ way and that her depiction does not distort the man she married. However, in the same introduction he writes that like Cravan, Loy ‘began camouflaging her once demonstrative and theatrical first-persons behind inscrutable selves, and adopted increasingly reclusive habits’.<sup>520</sup> If Loy did in fact practise Cravan-like methods of disguise and performance, then can we trust this ‘psychological profile’, and in doing so, are we missing Loy’s own possible investment in the writing of ‘Colossus’? Conover would like us to believe that Loy’s ‘Colossus’ is the ‘undressing’—that is, a

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<sup>517</sup> Nicholl, p. 8.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Conover, *NYD*, p. 104.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

physically and emotionally stripping down—of Arthur Cravan. Yet her manuscript, like many of her other writings about Cravan, is yet another deft angle by which to approach his posthumous image.

In a sense ‘Colossus’ is part of Loy’s own act of mourning, and her writings convey a controlled image that became collectively mourned by those who inscribed Cravan into their own movements and by Cravan scholars. Loy’s writings on Cravan do mean to arrive at a cohesive picture, one that is indisputably the most ‘knowing’ of them all, but to discredit her contribution to Cravan’s mythic status by portraying it as merely ‘factual’ is to undermine the achievements of ‘Colossus’. In whose interest should we ‘undress’ either Loy or Cravan, and what, if any reason is there to arrive at some ‘truth’? I have dispensed with any attempt to pin down some supposedly ‘actual nature’ of either Loy or Cravan in order to ask how Loy’s writing about Cravan shaped his current iconic status. How does ‘Colossus’ portray Cravan differently than Loy’s other writings about him? What is Loy’s involvement as a widow figure in her own text and how are these writings forms of eulogy?

Loy and Cravan’s romance is central to the published version of ‘Colossus’. By all accounts, including Loy’s, they were an unlikely pair. In an interview with Carolyn Burke, the French Dadaist painter Juliette Roche was far more interested in discussing Loy’s marriage than she was in commenting on Loy’s skills as a painter. Still in disbelief, Roche asked sixty years later: ‘Why did a woman as refined as Mina Loy marry a brute like Cravan?’<sup>521</sup> Bob Brown, an American expatriate who also emigrated to Mexico to avoid conscription and knew Cravan, included Loy and Cravan in his novel about the expatriate ‘Slackers’ community in Mexico, *You Gotta Live* (1932).<sup>522</sup> In the book, Rex (Cravan) and Rita (Loy) are harmoniously (and alliteratively) married,

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<sup>521</sup> Carolyn Burke, endnotes for ‘Recollecting Dada: Juliette Roche’, in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, ed. by Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 571-575, (p. 571). Burke’s interviews with Juliette Roche took place in April and August of 1977.

<sup>522</sup> Bob Brown, *You Gotta Live* (London: Harmsworth, 1932).

but somewhat awkwardly matched. William Carlos Williams also weighed in on Loy's marriage in his *Autobiography*:

Once Mina invited me to meet John Craven [sic]. I was a bit late and the small room was already crowded—by Frenchmen mostly. I remember, of course, Marcel Duchamp. At the end of the room was a French girl, of say eighteen or less, attended by some older woman. She lay reclining upon a divan, her legs straight out before her, surrounded by young men who had each a portion of her body in his possession which he caressed attentively, apparently unconscious of any rival. [...] I looked and turned to Mina. But she was engrossed with Craven. I was introduced to the man after a drink or two and in the end wandered wearily home as was my wont. Later Mina married Craven and went to Central America with him where he bought a seagoing craft of some sort. One evening, having triumphantly finished his job, he got into it to try it out in the bay before supper. He never returned. Pregnant on the shore, she watched the small ship move steadily away into the distance. For years she thought to see him again—that was how long ago? What? Thirty-five years.<sup>523</sup>

Williams's recollection is strangely banal and domestic. The image of Craven dusting off his hands and taking his little boat out before dinnertime is most likely a combination of Williams's conversations with Loy and his own misremembering. It is curious that Williams also misremembers Craven's name. Although the two were never properly acquainted—Craven left New York and disappeared soon after their meeting—it is surprising that Williams would be unfamiliar with the artistic reputation associated with Craven's name. One possible reason is that Williams would not have been involved in the European Dadaist circles that praised him. Interestingly, Loy narrates the same night, at the Arensbergs', quite differently.

One night King Dada [Duchamp] and Colossus [Craven] lolled about a divan in Walter's [Arensberg] parlor, engaged in the privileged male sport of the evening which consisted of drawing their forefingers along the green stockings of the blond Countess stretched among the cushions. Every now and then a man would rise, giving his place to another. Colossus had been occupied with one leg for ages, and when he had had enough, he came and laid on the floor beside me, tilting the brim of my hat onto the tip of my nose to cover my eyes—so as to hide from them the approval in his.

"Don't *have* him," urged Carlos [Williams], joining us. "You will only find yourself in a ridiculous situation. All these pugilists are bunglers in bed. I'm

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<sup>523</sup> William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 141.

off,” said the Doctor, kissing me good night. “You’re all so damned sophisticated, I might as well be deaf and dumb.”<sup>524</sup>

Reading these two accounts side-by-side, one immediately notices that Loy’s reaction to the ‘blond Countess’ is quite different to Williams’s obvious discomfort with the highly sexual display. His distrust of the scenario is betrayed by undertones of moral judgement: the girl is ‘eighteen [years old] or less’ and she is being caressed nearly all over. Loy claims that only the countess’s stockings are being touched; indeed Loy’s characterisation of the ‘girl’ as a ‘countess’ suggests that she is socially superior to her male admirers. Williams is acutely aware of the masculine competition at hand, whereas Loy’s description downplays the parlour scene as boring and almost bourgeois. With these two descriptions in mind, the French ‘young men’ ‘unconscious of any rival’ are in stark contrast with Williams, the American whom Loy portrays as so impotently unsophisticated that he might as well be ‘deaf and dumb’. If Williams is to be believed, he once remarked to his wife, Flossie, that he might have married Loy. Flossie quickly pointed out that he did not earn enough money.<sup>525</sup> Loy’s version of the evening hints at an undercurrent of masculine rivalry between Williams and Cravan and also, prophetically, quotes Williams as warning that she will only ‘end up in a ridiculous situation’. This ‘ridiculous situation’ is illustrated, years later, by Williams’s imagined account of Cravan and Loy’s ill-fated marriage. And although Williams could not correctly recall Cravan’s name, he concludes his retelling by adding that ‘[Cravan] was reputed to be a son of Oscar Wilde and had been a capable boxer and boxed in fact with Jack Johnson once in Spain’.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> Mina Loy, ‘Colossus’, *New York Dada*, ed. by Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), p. 107. (Hereafter cited as *NYD*).

<sup>525</sup> Charles Tomlinson, ‘Some American Poets: A Personal Record’, *Contemporary Literature* (Summer 1977), pp. 300-301. Cited in Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 220.

<sup>526</sup> Williams, p. 141.

Loy's description of Colossus's behaviour that night indicates that he was engrossed by her and not the reverse, as in Williams's version. Loy casts him as the dutiful, determined lover. However, Colossus is never truly sincere:

"All of your irony is assumed," he whispered to me, "You really have the heart of the romantic. Why will you not let me show you what life can be in the embrace of my boundless love? My one desire," he continued, parting the ethereal green grapes that hung from my hat and burying his lips in my hair, "my one desire is to be so very tender to you that you will smile without irony." While I laughed inwardly at how unknowingly men use stock phrases to advance their amour, Colossus importuned me again. "If you won't take me home with you, I shall never address you again."

"Colossus, I couldn't *bear* that. I give you my word of honor that the next time I meet you I will take you home with me."

"You needn't shout," he reproached with severe pudency, as if the whole scene had been staged in private, "everyone can hear you."<sup>527</sup>

Loy implies that his lovemaking is a performance, a spectacle meant for an audience of one. The extremes of his behaviour and his 'stock phrases', complete with a melodramatic scene in which he 'bur[ies] his lips in [her] hair' are grossly at odds with Cravan the brute. Loy's accession immediately changes Colossus's manner; the staged chase, which he has won, comes to an abrupt end and the play disintegrates as soon as the actors are exposed. Loy is well aware of her lover's game, or so 'Colossus' suggests. She documents her cool-headed resistance (and Cravan's persistence) before she describes their first night together. Loy casts herself as one who belongs in the assembled group and depicts Colossus as a less fashionable outsider.

To take a lover? What lover? Colossus was heavy. The 'moderns' accused him of admiring Victor Hugo! What was he doing in this crowd, anyway? "Well he has a title," the Americans reminded one another.

Having nothing of the modern spirit, he was at a disadvantage, and men at a social disadvantage are likelier to fall back upon 'love.' Therefore, I confided to myself, he might make a passable lover. I had forgotten how afraid of him I had once been.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Loy, 'Colossus', *NYD*, p. 108.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*



Part of Colossus's sexual appeal is that he lacks the social advantages of the other 'moderns'. On the one hand, Loy suggests that bedding Colossus might have a negative effect on her reputation as a modern among her circle. However, Colossus is also less threatening than his 'modern' counterparts. Unlike that select crowd, which Loy firmly describes as unscrupulously lascivious, Colossus is *passé* in the sense that his outmoded 'spirit' is still capable of love. As one who appears to lack cynicism, and who discourages Loy's 'assumed irony' towards modern romance, Colossus is no longer a threat.

'Colossus' soon backtracks on its disparaging picture of Cravan as a boring brute:

Only later would I realize that to most of those early encounters he had come as an entirely different persona, and wonder how it was that I had been able to recognize any identity behind his frequent transformations. Not until those separate elements had, through intimacy, coalesced into a single man did those 'first people' I met 'of him' become entirely alien.<sup>529</sup>

The 'first people', or first impressions Loy has of Cravan, quickly unify into the 'real' Colossus. This transition from seeing Colossus as undesirable to desirable occurs once Loy has given in to his urging and taken him as a lover. It is only when Loy decides to merge her own life (and reputation) with Colossus's that she begins to highlight his 'modern' qualities.

It is impossible, or at least dangerous, to remember Colossus after he left New York, for by this time I had magnified his being to such proportions that all comparisons vanished, which is the trick of falling in love. During the period of our New York acquaintance I had gradually become aware of the adventures that preceded his coming to America, and the manuscripts he left behind set in motion a cerebral newsreel depicting his life as vivid as the terse remarks he had sown in my mind.

[...]

The newsreel of my memory—as if to retrace the initial impetus which unaccountably determines a personality from birth—now flashed back to a frame from Colossus' infancy.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-113.

What Loy knows about Colossus is informed by their own personal relationship and by his legacy in print and from rumours before they met. The ‘newsreel’ of Loy’s memory extends back into a past she can only imagine based on Cravan’s stories. The section of ‘Colossus’ in which Loy’s ‘newsreel’ rewinds is a rapid succession of pithy anecdotes and alleged quotes from Cravan. One of his most often repeated phrases, ‘On ne me fait pas marcher, moi!’, registers Cravan’s objections to getting involved in the war.<sup>531</sup>

According to Loy, Colossus prophesied:

“*Your* war,” Colossus would hoot, “will be the last war if it never leaves off. But it is going to be over sooner than expected, followed by an inextricable confusion. For one thing the whole world will go bankrupt in consequence, and remember what I say,--not at once, not for at least ten years—probably twenty.”

He sounded preposterous. An uncultured heretic shooting the farcical arrows of his predictions into the glorious holocaust of heroism. (How I regret having paid so little attention to these predictions).<sup>532</sup>

This incomparable being, whom it is ‘dangerous’ and ‘impossible’ for Loy to remember accurately, becomes ultra modern, a genius prophet who predicts the horrors and aftermath of World War I. In the vein of a seer, Cassandra-like, Cravan’s foresight adds to Loy’s image of Colossus as straddling the present and the future. Ahead of his time, Colossus also prefigures the artistic annihilations of ‘modern’ aesthetics. Loy’s phrase ‘the glorious holocaust of heroism’, or the massive loss of human life in the war, also points to Cravan’s refusal to sacrifice himself for anyone else’s political ideal of the heroic. It is possible that Loy invented Cravan’s ‘predictions’ so that Cravan’s detractors and admirers alike could feel the full weight of loss over his death. What could be more tragic than the prematurely dead and unheeded voice that foretells the first great tragedy of the new century? Loy argues that Cravan saw beyond modernity’s immediate promises of artistic reinvention and of a redefinition of nationhood through

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

war and migration. Throughout 'Colossus', Cravan retains his individuality and he exudes an intellectual integrity from the very moment of his birth. Loy writes:

He had a faded photo of himself in an embroidered dress. It gave a surprising impression of the seated baby's backbone being a rod of iron. He had said, when he showed it to me, "As soon as I could speak, I knew that everything people told me was a lie. All they say—all they do," he mused disgustedly, "is an attempt to drag me down to their own level."<sup>533</sup>

'Colossus' is a film-like documentation of Colossus's creation and his being. Loy's use of the term 'newsreel' suggests that these recollections are in one sense factual. The early twentieth-century writer and co-founder of the London Film Society, Iris Barry wrote that 'News Pictorals' were a 'prelude to the real picture-play'.<sup>534</sup> These newsreels, or short, pre-feature films, 'are apt to contain intriguing bits of information' 'about the psychological necessities of modern humanity'.<sup>535</sup> They were often composed of 'current affairs', but were not limited to the 'news'.<sup>536</sup> Barry contends that although audiences are drawn into cinemas to see the 'fictional' feature, newsreels can shape cinemagoers ideas about how to behave, shop, travel and dress in the 'modern' era in a type of covert advertising.<sup>537</sup> Loy's memories of Cravan, written out as a cerebral 'newsreel', support her claims of their factualness. However, if we consider the cinematic experience of selectively coded messages, then Loy's 'newsreel' of Cravan's life might serve to advertise his iconic 'modernity'.

Her episodic narrative pieces Cravan together into a specific posthumous myth. Loy's intimacy with Cravan's body and with his mind superimposes his memory onto her own. On the surface it might appear that 'Colossus' is considerably different from Loy's other autobiographies. 'The Child and the Parent', 'Goy Israels' and 'Islands in

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<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

<sup>534</sup> Iris Barry, 'The Scope of the Cinema', in *Gender in Modernism*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), pp. 826-827. Originally published in *Vogue* (London) 64.4 (August 1924): 65, 76.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid., p. 827.

<sup>536</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, <<http://www.oed.com>> 'newsreel'.

<sup>537</sup> Barry, 'The Scope of Cinema', p. 827.

the Air' depict Loy's youth and centre on her incipient consciousness. However, in 'Colossus' Loy is interested in tracing the origin of Cravan's artistic nature. Much like her studious delineation of her own character, 'Colossus' moves from one visual image to the next and each 'frame' builds on an existing narrative of Cravan's psychology. Or, as Conover's title 'Arthur Cravan Undressed' suggests, Loy is stripping off Cravan's veils and examining the contours of his 'true' core. In previous chapters, I have outlined Loy's autohagiography, which she largely achieves by casting herself as fated from birth to become a spirit of the modern age. In 'Colossus' Loy has similarly produced an image of Cravan as prefiguring modernity in everything he says and does. The process of 'modernising' Cravan in 'Colossus' is slow; it requires Loy's recognition of Cravan's true nature from his antics. In Loy's later writing about Cravan the transition is already complete: Cravan as the father of modernity is absolute. It is also important to note that Conover's selections from 'Colossus' do not necessarily reflect the full scope of the original privately held manuscript. Conover chose to end his published version of Loy's memoir just after the pair exchange wedding vows. According to Loy, after she and Cravan married, Cravan said, "'Now I have caught you. I am at ease'".<sup>538</sup> It is impossible to know definitively what follows this final section, but the effect of this glowing quotation of Cravan is that it lends credibility to Loy's claims about their mutual love. It also shores up the reader's faith in Cravan's death, and means to dispel rumours (that persist today) of Cravan abandoning Loy and seeking refuge in a faked death and various careful pseudonyms. The reader is left with Conover's imposed 'happy ending' and the image of Cravan as the dutiful lover who is finally charmed away from his nomadic isolation. On the page opposite to this crafted denouement is an undated photograph of Loy with a caption that reads: 'Mina Loy (Mrs. Arthur Cravan),

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<sup>538</sup> Loy, 'Colossus', *NYD*, p. 119.

poet'.<sup>539</sup> Loy sits demurely, her eyes closed, her face downcast and her hands loosely interwoven, as if she were silently and obediently waiting for the return of her lost husband.

Loy's other writings about Cravan build on 'Colossus's' crafted posthumous image. These include the poems 'Mexican Desert', 'Perlun', 'The Widow's Jazz', 'Letters of the Unliving', the 'Colossus' section of her autobiographical epic 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose', and poems that meditate on the absent and dead lover, 'Echo' and 'The Dead'. In most of these poems, Loy figures herself as an abandoned widow who is left to converse with an unanswering abyss.

In the editor's notes to the most recent edition of Loy's poetry, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996) (hereafter referred to as *LLB96*), Conover describes 'Mexican Desert' as 'a collaged recollection of [Loy's] traverse of the parched Mexican desert in 1918 with her second husband, [Cravan]...'.<sup>540</sup> Although the two manuscript versions of this poem are undated, Conover estimates that 'Mexican Desert' was written between 1919 and 1920. It was published in *The Dial*, issue 70, in June 1921.<sup>541</sup> Newly married, Loy and Cravan would have made their desert crossing from Mexico City to Salina Cruz by train.<sup>542</sup> However, the poem is devoid of the hopefulness one would expect. It begins:

The belching ghost-wail of the locomotive  
Trailing her rattling wooden tail  
Into the jazz-band sunset. . . .

The mountains in a row  
Set pinnacles of ferocious isolation  
Under the alien hot heaven<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Ibid., p. 118. (Figure 7). Ironically, Conover has chosen a photo of Loy taken by her first husband in Paris in 1905. The photo's caption reads 'Ducy Haweis – Stephen [illegible- 'wife'?] Mother of Giles' (Giles was Loy's son by Haweis who died in 1923).

<sup>540</sup> Roger I. Conover, 'Notes on the Text', *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), p. 195. (Hereafter cited as *LLB96*).

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Burke, p. 262.

<sup>543</sup> Loy, 'Mexican Desert', *LLB96*, p. 74.

Harbingers of Loy's eventual widowhood dominate the landscape: the 'ghost-wail' and rattling tail extend ominously into an eternal future. The living dead permeate the desert scene and, isolated, they 'thrust up the parching appeal' and crack the earth open in their continual afterlife.<sup>544</sup> The endless burning Loy depicts recurs in later poems in which the widow appears as a 'suttee'.<sup>545</sup> Loy's references to dryness and death hint at an infertile emptiness, and allude to the theories of Cravan's body languishing robbed and murdered in the desert.<sup>546</sup> Cravan's corpse appears to her in the form of their last journey together; she is traversing back over the memory of this crossing haunted by their eventual separation.

'The Widow's Jazz' elaborates on the widow's symbolic death through the death of her husband. Most likely, it was written in 1927 while Loy was living in Paris and in the process of writing her autobiographies. On May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1927, Loy read this poem aloud at Natalie Barney's salon on the rue Jacob after rehearsing with a voice coach.<sup>547</sup> Barney notes in her memoir that Loy trained for her performance much like a boxer would for a fight; she is of course referring to Cravan and equating Loy's reading to Cravan's boxing. She also describes Loy as walking 'as though angels were already nibbling at her heels'.<sup>548</sup> Barney's comments suggest that Loy's 'battle' is with death, both Cravan's death and Loy's own resistance against being drawn into the widow's premature afterlife. However, the melding together of the two blurs the boundaries of life and death for Cravan and for Loy. Cravan is 'alive' through Loy's poem and her performance, and Loy straddles life and death through her commemorative acts.

'The Widow's Jazz' depicts Loy's unfulfilled desire; the 'tangle of pale snakes' and the 'lethargic ecstasy' of the dancers sexualise the poem's first half. It is not until

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>545</sup> Loy, 'The Widow's Jazz', *LLB96*, p. 96.

<sup>546</sup> Conover, 'Notes on the Text', *LLB96*, p. 102.

<sup>547</sup> Burke, p. 361.

<sup>548</sup> Conover, 'Notes on the Text', *LLB96*, p. 204.

the lines, 'Cravan/ colossal absentee/ the substitute dark/ rolls to the incandescent memory', that the poem's interest in corporeal desire turns to Loy's own longing.<sup>549</sup> Once again Cravan represents darkness and emptiness and Loy burns as a 'rich suttee' and she is 'seared by the flames' of the erotic jazz.<sup>550</sup> She is filled with the ashes of her husband's 'murdered laughter', and is impotent against the backdrop of the music and the swaying dancers.<sup>551</sup> The desert abyss in 'Mexican Desert' unravels here again into echoes:

as my desire  
receded  
to the distance of the dead

searches  
the opaque silence  
of unpeopled space.<sup>552</sup>

Loy returns to an infertile deathscape and recedes away from the delights of the 'echoes of the flesh'.<sup>553</sup> Like the Jazz dancers partnering, she is partnered with an unreachable, dead lover. The most striking section of the poem, 'Husband/ how secretly you cuckold me with death', is the only line addressed directly to Cravan.<sup>554</sup> Here the traditional meaning of 'cuckold' is reversed from the husband fooled by his unfaithful wife to the wife who is deceived by her husband's affair with death. The mistress death opposes 'love's survivor' (Loy) and the two enter into a relationship without the absent Colossus. To 'cuckold' is also 'to fool' and, in one sense, Loy is being fooled 'secretly' by her ignorance of Cravan's death and the absence of his corpse. 'Secretly' also suggests that Loy is hiding her inner impotence from the vibrant initial setting of the poem—and that her desire is only inwardly absent and not outwardly known. Much like

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<sup>549</sup> Loy, 'The Widow's Jazz', *LLB96*, p. 96.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

those ‘nibbling angels’, death’s potency is actualised through Loy’s ability to write and thereby to bring the voice and memory of Cravan into the living world. She increasingly figures herself as an otherworldly presence, an image that is also perpetuated by the memoirs of those who knew her in the years after Cravan’s disappearance.

In her recent essay on mourning and jazz music in Loy’s poetry, Tanya Dalziell suggests that Loy’s poems ‘are not elegies, but rather poems that are suspicious of the work of mourning and are consequently concerned to enact their own ethics of mourning’.<sup>555</sup> How Loy ‘enact[s]’ her ‘own ethics of mourning’ is unclear. She also contends that ‘The Widow’s Jazz’, written while ‘many of [Loy’s] contemporaries were increasingly proclaiming jazz itself to be “passing” or “dead”’, might be an ‘elegy to jazz’.<sup>556</sup> Dalziell’s reading of ‘The Widow’s Jazz’ is problematic because it assumes that Loy’s interest in jazz translates into an awareness of jazz’s roots within African-American culture. In archived notes, Loy wrote that jazz was ‘a stimulus to memory’<sup>557</sup> and that in ‘old age—listening to exotic music one is reminded of myriad inflections in the pleasure of love’.<sup>558</sup> It appears also from Loy’s poem ‘Negro Dancer’, in which she describes the ‘aboriginal’ woman’s dance as ‘The ancestral smoulder/ of jungle ritual’, that Loy typically associates non-white races with sensuality.<sup>559</sup> To an extent ‘The Widow’s Jazz’ challenges the desexualisation of the widow figure, but the poem’s speaker remains ‘impotent’ when confronted by desire, and her isolation is sharpened in contrast with the sexualised jazz dancers. Dalziell correctly points out that the simultaneity of jazz relies on ‘call and response’ whereas the writer of elegy is

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<sup>555</sup> Tanya Dalziell, ‘Mourning and Jazz in the Poetry of Mina Loy’, in *Modernism and Mourning*, ed. by Patricia Rae (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 102-117 (p. 113).

<sup>556</sup> Dalziell, p. 109.

<sup>557</sup> Loy, YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 163.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, box 7, folder 187. On the back of this manuscript page, Loy writes about the ‘soldier’s death on the field of honour’. This might be another example of Loy’s association of death with sensuality and the body, as in ‘The Widow’s Jazz’.

<sup>559</sup> Mina Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger Conover (Highlands: The Jargon Society, 1982), p. 216. (Hereafter cited as *LLB82*).



traditionally writing alone about one who is absent.<sup>560</sup> Participance, address and a lack of response, are brought into Loy's elegiac poems about Cravan.

Loy's conversation with the dead is best exemplified by her 1949 poem 'Letters of the Unliving'.<sup>561</sup> The poem, written while Loy was living in New York, partly relies on readings from Cravan's letters that were written to Loy four decades earlier during a brief separation. In these letters, Cravan bemoans her absence and dramatically threatens suicide if she does not join him in Mexico.<sup>562</sup> She refers to his temporary madness, 'your documented terror of dementia/ due to some merely earthly absence', and notes the irony of his fear now that they have been divided by death.<sup>563</sup> 'Letters of the Unliving' is in one sense an unsent letter, written in response to her letters from Cravan. However, 'Letters' is also unsendable; it is written for an audience that excludes an absent Cravan.

Loy's poem engages with an epistolary tradition of letters sent to dead or absent lovers. Ovid's *Heroides* are verse-epistles written from the perspective of Classical heroine figures. These women exhibit a literary and a mythic cache in being at once chosen and left behind by their hero lovers. Characters such as Helen of Troy and Odysseus's neglected wife Penelope bemoan their present fates while giving evidence to their romantic claims on their husbands or lovers. In a few of the *Heroides*, the letters function as a reinstatement of the heroines' right to the relationship as wife and seduced or abandoned lover. The love letter, as Roland Barthes suggests, is a dialectical, and

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<sup>560</sup> Dalziell, p. 103.

<sup>561</sup> Loy, 'Letters of the Unliving', *LLB96*, pp. 129-132.

<sup>562</sup> Nicholl, p. 10. Nicholl does not cite his source, however Cravan's letters to Loy have been published in French, the language in which they were originally written. See Arthur Cravan, *Oeuvres: Poems, Articles, Letters* ed. by Jean-Pierre Begot (Paris, Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1987), pp. 135-183. In a letter from Cravan to Loy written from Mexico City on 30 December 1917, Cravan writes of his dire state of mind: 'Je n'ai presque plus la force de t'écrire et si je savais que le fasse en vain, je me suiciderais dans cinq minutes', (p. 181). *Oeuvres* also contains excerpts of 'Colossus' (translated into French) that appear similar to those in *NYD*, pp. 233-260.

<sup>563</sup> Loy, 'Letters of the Unliving', *LLB96*, p. 130.

quite literal, *correspondence* that requires a response.<sup>564</sup> Loy's poem 'Letters' meditates on a two-fold question: 'Can whom has ceased to be/ Ever have had existence', 'Can one who still has being/ be inexistent?''<sup>565</sup> In other words, has death erased not only the addresser but also the addressee of these love letters? As in Loy's earlier poems about Cravan, death and the past inhabit a dry, infertile space and his absent body stirs her longing:

As erst my body and my reason  
you left to the drought of your dying:  
the longing and the lack  
when the racked creature  
shouted  
to an unanswering hiatus  
"reunite us"

- - - till slyly- - soporose  
patience creeps up on passion.<sup>566</sup>

Loy no longer resists being symbolically reunited with Cravan by death:

I am become  
dumb  
in answer  
to your dead language of amor

Diminuendo  
of life's imposture  
implies no possible retrial  
By my so now-while self  
Of my cloud-corpse  
Beshadowing your shroud

the one I was with you  
inhumed in chasms,  
craters torn by atomic emotion  
among chaos<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), pp. 157-159.

<sup>565</sup> Loy, *LLB96*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

The widow as suttee becomes complete—not as a grieving sacrifice, but out of Loy’s central argument that her ‘self’ after Cravan’s death can only be companioned by loss. Momentarily, Loy is subsumed into the object of her loss. Her only escape is to forget the past:

O leave me  
my final illiteracy  
of memory’s languour

my preference  
to drift in lenient coma  
an older Ophelia  
on Lethe<sup>568</sup>

Lethe is an appropriate choice; as one of the mythical rivers of Hades, it represents forgetfulness and is associated with death. Loy’s preference is for memory to die with the dead and not to continuously remind her of what is absent; according to her title, Cravan is not strictly ‘dead’ to Loy, but ‘unliving’, and therefore ever-presently lost.

Loy’s concern with providing proof of her existence in ‘Letters’ also appears in her autobiographical writings, in particular the introductory chapter to ‘Islands in the Air’, entitled ‘Hurry’.<sup>569</sup> In ‘Letters’ she writes:

The present implies presence  
thus  
unauthorized by the present  
these letters are left authorless—  
have lost all origin  
since the inscribing hand  
lost life - - -<sup>570</sup>

Cravan’s letters represent his absent corpse; they are a body without ‘presence’ or ‘origin’ and the only remaining ‘evidence’ of his existence. The author’s death effaces the ‘inscribing hand’. Loy’s own obsessive rewriting of her autobiographies might also

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<sup>568</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>569</sup> Loy, ‘Hurry’, ‘Islands in the Air’, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 58, pp. 1-7 of typescript. Loy writes about her anxiety to produce proof of her existence on page 6.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

be working against her fear that her 'life evidence' will one day become authorless with her death. Although she traces back through her own racial and psychological lineage to find her origins, she may have become exasperated with each version for its inability to bring the author into being. What implications might Loy's premise in 'Letters' have for the writing of her own life? If the mortalising force of the Hurry both urges her to prove her existence through the act of writing and simultaneously hurries her through living, then her record speaks of its own eventual end. She is working back through a life that must find its 'end' in the present, which is ever-changing. One could argue that the reality is that Loy is not dead. However, Loy's assertion in her later poems that she is living in the void left by a symbolic death urges the reader to consider the constant revision of her autobiographies as an attempt to find an origin for that present death. It may be that Loy's excavation of her past is meant to rework itself into an explanation of what she calls 'life's intemperance'.<sup>571</sup> In 'Letters' she writes, 'No creator/ reconstrues scar-tissue/ to shine as birth-star'.<sup>572</sup> In a sense, Loy's autobiographies are her attempts to return to this 'birth-star', or pure origin, through her experience of loss. She assumes the role of creator and, in doing so, she grapples with the impossible task of recounting her own life without the subjectivity of the present. That is not to say that Loy is rewriting the past in order to resurrect herself, or that she gives meaning to her life before Cravan's death in order to erase the tragedy of her loss. Her elegies for Cravan cannot be equated with her autobiographical project. However, Loy figures herself as his widow and assumes the role of one whose relationship with death is as strong as the bonds of marriage. She, too, is drawn into 'This package of ago' that 'creaks with the horror of echo/ out of void'.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

In her poem 'Echo', Loy elaborates on her marriage to the unanswering void.

Published after her death, 'Echo' does not specifically refer to Cravan.

Life is a loitering inquiry  
a challenging cry

lashing the earless edifice  
of ceaseless mystery

originated in earth  
piercing the sky

spurning our anxious 'Why'  
to rebound on us

as echo  
only echo

echo is no answer<sup>574</sup>

Loy's description of life as a 'loitering inquiry' and a 'challenging cry' seems contradictory. One phrase suggests passivity and the other suggests aggression. The five short stanzas that follow present Man as the victim of an 'earless' creator whose questions remain unanswered except by the echo of his own voice. However, this 'ceaseless mystery' that is 'originated in earth' could also be interpreted as the enigma of Cravan's disappearance. Here the origin of Cravan's being makes its full transition from the origin of his death and the location of his body, to the site of Loy's commemoration of him through writing. The initial imagined conversation between Loy and Cravan in 'Letters' and 'The Widow's Jazz' moves towards Loy's complete isolation; she is in dialogue with an unanswering deity and therefore only hearing her own metaphoric 'cries' returned as echoes. Among Loy's archived poem drafts is a handwritten draft of 'Echo' on which Loy has written: 'ask Greek for this'.<sup>575</sup> Other notes suggest that this was perhaps meant to be part of a sequence of 'echo sound' poems. Another page also contains the lines 'Alabaster albatross/ Breast ablaze/ in Bottomless abyss/ of asbestos

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<sup>574</sup> Loy, 'Echo', *LLB82*, p. 240.

<sup>575</sup> It appears that Loy was unaware that 'Echo' is a Greek word.

all bliss'.<sup>576</sup> It seems plausible that Loy's poem refers to the Echo of Greek mythology, the jilted and lovesick nymph who could mimic but make no original speech. Ultimately her unrequited love for Narcissus, and the wrath of Hera, transformed her into the sound of an echo.<sup>577</sup> Possibly Loy is commenting on her own reduced state following the death of Cravan and on the dual meaning of echoes: as rhyme within poetic form and poems as 'echoes' of loss and death.

The completion of mourning in Loy's work, from her early poems to 'Colossus' and her later elegies, coincided with her involvement in forming Cravan's posthumous artistic reputation. The cover photograph of *LLB96*, the most recent published collection of poems, was taken in 1920 by Man Ray. Loy had just returned to New York after Cravan's disappearance and a brief sojourn in South America and Europe. New York's artist circles and the media were debating Dada, the new 'anti-art' European movement. In Ray's photograph, Loy wears a darkroom thermometer in her ear.<sup>578</sup> In her biography of Loy, Burke suggests that because the thermometer's mercury is pictured at zero, the photo might have been a commentary on Loy's chilled emotional state after the loss of her husband.<sup>579</sup> Loy's writing associates widowhood with an infertile, parched landscape. Burke also records some of the impressions of Loy's friends after her return to New York without Cravan. Williams was initially sympathetic; he listened to Loy's stories about Cravan's disappearance and her belief that he was still alive and languishing in a Mexican jail.<sup>580</sup> As I have discussed in Chapter Two, Marianne Moore's poem about Loy, 'Those Various Scalpels', alludes to Loy's iciness and refers

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<sup>576</sup> Loy, YCAL MSS 6, box 5, folder 88.

<sup>577</sup> Ovid, 'Narcissus and Echo', Book III of *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A.D. Melville, introduced by E.J. Kenney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 61-66.

<sup>578</sup> Man Ray, Front Cover Photograph, 'Mina Loy in New York City, 1920', *LLB96*.

<sup>579</sup> Burke, p. 299.

<sup>580</sup> In a letter to the London Review of Books, dated 6 April 2006 (vol. 28, no. 7), James Mishalani argues that the inaccuracies in Williams' recollections of Cravan's death suggests that Williams did not hear of it from Loy first-hand. I would suggest instead that Loy, as much as the 'buzz' from their circle, mislead sympathisers. Loy's own writing is the original source of the misconception that Cravan went to sea with Loy pregnant and waving goodbye to him from the shore. (see Burke, p. 457, n. 265 and references to Loy's account given to Cravan's mother, Nellie Grandjean)

to the well-known mythology of Cravan's death.<sup>581</sup> The American publisher Robert McAlmon's *roman à clef* about Greenwich Village literary life, *Post-Adolescence* (1923), features a character based on Loy named Gusta Rolph. McAlmon recounts an imagined scene between Loy and Djuna Barnes in which Gusta voices what McAlmon calls her 'romantic soul'.<sup>582</sup> In this scene Gusta says "'My mind will keep wondering about that husband of mine" [...] "whether he's really drowned or not. If it had only been my first husband," she adds, "so he couldn't pester me about the children"'.<sup>583</sup> Later she proclaims that she is 'finished': "'The war, you know," she explains, "waiting three years for my husband, and coming here expecting to find him only to find that he was drowned"'.<sup>584</sup>

According to Burke, McAlmon found Loy to be so absorbed by Cravan's death that she was constantly talking and writing about 'a man who could think with each part of his body'.<sup>585</sup> The writing to which McAlmon and Burke refer is presumably an early draft of 'Colossus', which Loy most likely wrote with the same obsession as she recounted the circumstances of his death to her friends. Burke suggests that by 1921 Loy was 'too unhappy to complete the novel she had begun about Cravan'.<sup>586</sup> It is impossible to access and examine the existing manuscript for evidence of Burke's claim. Burke was allowed to read Loy's manuscript, and perhaps her assertion is based on her analysis of the privately held 'Colossus' text. However, if Loy did in fact abandon her writing of 'Colossus' a year after her arrival in New York in 1920, then her reasons for writing 'Colossus' may have extended beyond her need to record her memories of him.

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<sup>581</sup> Conover, 'Introduction', *LLB96*, p. xiv.

<sup>582</sup> Robert McAlmon, *Post-Adolescence* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), pp. 14-18 (p. 14). Originally published in 1923 by Contact Editions (Paris).

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>585</sup> Burke, p. 296.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

Around the time of Loy's return to New York, Cravan's and her own name were being publicized as 'official adherents' of the international Dadaist movement.<sup>587</sup> Without Loy's consent, Cravan's words and performances were cited as precursory to the formation of Dadaist practice. 'Colossus', on the other hand, highlights Cravan's uniqueness and singles him out as a 'biological mystic', or a genius of the body.<sup>588</sup> In 'Colossus', Loy creates an artistic plan wholly confined to the thought and manufacture of Cravan's being. If Cravan was, as Loy argued, an artistic prophet, then his followers could only imitate his original genius.<sup>589</sup> So little of Cravan's work circulated within New York circles that any knowledge of his 'genius' would have to be based on his sensational performances and on his conversation. Burke writes that in the early 1930s Breton was keen to publish Cravan's surviving manuscripts. Loy apparently worried over the interest in her husband's legacy on the part of the founders of the surrealist movement:

[Cravan] had "taken on an immortality as an evergrowing myth," [Loy] wrote, but it was hard to accept those aspects of the myth that escaped her control. When, for example, the story of his disappearance was told in a way that implied his wish to leave her behind, she went into a rage. After Gabi Picabia published a memoir of Cravan that was largely complimentary but expressed doubt about the reasons for his disappearance, Mina cut her dead.<sup>590</sup>

It is surprising that Loy chose not to publish 'Colossus', and that she never completed it, especially if she was so concerned with controlling Cravan's legacy. Is it possible that Loy was pleased in part by Cravan's 'afterlife'? Or might she have chosen not to complete 'Colossus' because the Cravan myth had already taken hold so quickly after his disappearance? In the published selections of 'Colossus' Loy concentrates on stories

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<sup>587</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>588</sup> Loy, 'unidentified fragments', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 70.

<sup>589</sup> Most recent work on Cravan's life and writing seems to be produced in Europe, especially France. See José Pierre's study, written in French, *Arthur Cravan Le Prophète* (Paris: Actuel, 1992) for an analysis of Cravan as the prophet of Dadaism and Surrealism.

<sup>590</sup> Burke, p. 381. Loy's quotation, 'taken on an immortality as an evergrowing myth', is from her novel, *Insel*, ed. by Elizabeth Arnold (Santa Rosa, CA.: Black Sparrow Press, 1991), p. 160. On this page of *Insel*, Loy complains about Insel's (the novel's central character, the Surrealist painter Richard Oelze) fascination with Cravan, a man he claims has 'ideas identical with his own'.



and a recounting of their public meetings that would have been familiar to her audience, the New York literati. One comes away from reading the available sections of 'Colossus' with the impression that had Loy published it during the 1920s, it would have been too soon to hold the interest of her readership. 'Colossus' has a nostalgic sheen, unlike Loy's other autobiographical writings, and reads more like a memoir. The 'Enter Colossus' section of her autobiographical poem, 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose' (1923-1925) borrows some elements of Colossus's upbringing from the 'Colossus' manuscript. She works the description of seeing his baby portrait from 'Colossus' into the lines:

And the first time  
that he ever sits up  
devouring his pap  
it is as if a pillar of iron  
erects him  
in place of a spine<sup>591</sup>

She later elaborates on his infant misbehaviour of 'throwing the tea-pot' and 'pissing into our reverend pastor's hat' to justify his 'sense of fun' ingrained from the moment of his birth.<sup>592</sup> This is the first and last time Colossus makes an appearance in 'Anglo-Mongrels'. His personality, which Loy describes as that of a child 'criminal', is provided in contrast to Ova (Loy) and to the effete Esau Penfold (Loy's character based on her first husband, the artist and photographer Stephen Haweis).<sup>593</sup> Colossus's physical and mental voracity opposes Ova's reticent naïveté and Esau's intellectual impotence. However, 'Anglo-Mongrels' ends with Ova's adolescence and we never learn from the poem that Colossus and Esau are her future husbands. Like the other characters in this poem, Colossus features as a racial type. He is 'the male fruit/ of a Celtic couple' born in an 'Alpine' resort; he is another of Loy's 'anglo-mongrels' and

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<sup>591</sup> Loy, 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose', *LLB*82, p. 150.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*

his strength originates in his refusal of social propriety.<sup>594</sup> Colossus's mother, that 'gracious little lady-bird/ of a mamma', is 'determined she will do/ her best to keep him/ a little gentleman/ like his ancestors/ even/ if he does not live in / London'.<sup>595</sup> The dominant 'heroes' of Loy's epic are those who disavow their ancestral inheritance and move towards a hybrid, modern spirit.

In 'Enter Colossus' Loy's contribution to the Cravan myth is limited by her avoidance of his artistic life. Colossus is an archetype, a mythical construct like the poem's other protagonists, Ova and Exodus. Antonella Francini and others have suggested that the 'Colossus' manuscript was meant to be a part of an ongoing larger autobiographical work that would include 'Islands in the Air' and possibly *Insel*.<sup>596</sup> An examination of Loy's multiple manuscript drafts of 'Islands in the Air' suggests that some kind of unity was planned among these different 'novels'. It is possible that, like 'Anglo-Mongrels', she meant to bring the narrative of her childhood and the lives of those in her adult life together to form one narrative. If this is true, then 'Colossus' may not be an attempt to commemorate Cravan. It seems likely that 'Colossus' instead functions as a fragment of Loy's autobiography and that it was never meant to be published separately.

In addition to Conover's version of 'Colossus', published in *New York Dada* (1986), is another selection from Loy's original and now privately held 'Colossus' manuscript published under the title 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' in *LLB82*.<sup>597</sup> This excerpt is in a section Conover titled 'Ready Mades', alluding to Duchamp's 'found' constructions, which I discussed in Chapter 1. In the textual notes to *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (hereafter cited as *LLB82*), Conover describes this selection and the others in

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<sup>594</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-151.

<sup>596</sup> Antonella Francini, 'Mina Loy's *Islands in the Air*: Chapter I', *Italian Poetry Review*, vol. 1 (2006), 221-233.

<sup>597</sup> Loy, 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!', *LLB82*, pp. 317-322.

the 'Ready Mades' section as 'improvised from unpublished notes, prose fragments, or drafts found in [Loy's] folders. Titles and arrangements are the editor's'.<sup>598</sup> No further elaboration about the context of these 'improvised' 'readymade' documents is offered. Conover modelled his title after one of Cravan's own essay titles from *Maintenant*: 'Oscar Wilde Lives!'.<sup>599</sup> Cravan's piece narrated a fictitious meeting between himself and his (long since dead) uncle. In the essay, he describes Wilde as a grey-bearded and much diminished man who has chosen to go into hiding and forge his own death. The notorious 'article' was picked up shortly after *Maintenant* published it by the *New York Times* and it was believed by some to be true.<sup>600</sup> Conover's naming of excerpts from 'Colossus' 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' alludes to the possibility of Cravan faking his own death and living anonymously. It also imagines a kind of reunion between Loy and Cravan within her retold memories of him and suggests that Loy's eulogizing of Cravan kept his legacy alive. However, Conover's construction of his 'Ready Mades' does not distinguish Loy's 'drafts' from 'fragments' or 'notes': all are mined equally for 'found' art. *LLB82*'s version of 'Colossus' barely acknowledges Loy's relationship to Cravan.

This version is so heavily excised that the reader does not realize that Loy and Cravan spent time together until the final lines:

Cravan's truth was his *oeuvre*—that incipient thing for whose sustenance it appeared he must swallow the ocean and eat up the earth—that tireless tramp of continents, that scissor-like stride of the boxer which for the time that I accompanied him seemed a veritable mastication of space.<sup>601</sup>

Ironically, these lines conclude Conover's reassembled contribution to Loy's published oeuvre. How true to Loy's original draft is this selection? In Conover's introduction to *New York Dada*'s excerpts from 'Colossus', he states that '[n]o portion of *Colossus* has

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<sup>598</sup> Conover, 'Notes', *LLB82*, p. 389.

<sup>599</sup> Cravan, pp. 44-54. Originally published in *Maintenant* 3 (October 1913).

<sup>600</sup> Burke, p. 234.

<sup>601</sup> Loy, 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!', *LLB82*, p. 322.

ever been published before'.<sup>602</sup> 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' was published in 1982, four years before *New York Dada*. If 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' is not a 'portion' of 'Colossus' then how can one account for the obvious similarities between the two texts? Unlike 'Colossus', 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' includes no details of Loy and Cravan's courtship. The *LLB82* text also excludes all of 'Colossus's' dialogue between Loy and Cravan. 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' is limited to Loy's observations about Cravan's character and his guiding aesthetic principles. In a section from 'Colossus' that is reminiscent of Cravan's poem 'Hie!', Loy describes her husband's voracious mental appetite for all things. 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' includes an almost identical passage. There are two omissions, which I have reinserted into the 'Colossus' text (reproduced below) in brackets.

It was not only in his proportions that Colossus varied from the average man – but in the telescopic properties of those dimensions. He could push his entire consciousness into a wisp of grass, plunge his whole being through a dish of frost in a wheel rut – for when he halted to observe he seemed to leave his immeasurable carcass on the threshold of his interest. And when [--cross, hungry, down at hell--] he had engulfed in his regard every pebble, every wish, every perpendicular of skyscraper, every metallic suspension and every square millimetre of [superficies of] the city he roamed in tenacious idleness – a sort of inquietude would invade his motor centers.<sup>603</sup>

Aside from these two discrepancies between 'Colossus' and 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' the wording of these paragraphs is identical. The 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' version continues after 'motor centers': 'He could no longer remain—"God how New York has contracted," he would say; "Dieu—que l'Amérique se rétrécisse." "There is no longer room for me." So putting his Providence in his pocket as others do their traveller's checks, he was on his way.'<sup>604</sup> The next paragraph describes Cravan's *modus operandi* when he arrived in a new city: 'he would give it a glance and assess its population—

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<sup>602</sup> Conover, 'Mina Loy's "Colossus": Arthur Cravan Undressed', in *NYD*, p. 104. Correspondence with Conover about the similarities between 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' and 'Excerpts from "Colossus"' proved inconclusive.

<sup>603</sup> Loy, 'Colossus', *NYD*, p. 111. Compare with Loy, 'Arthur Cravan is Alive', *LLB82*, p. 319.

<sup>604</sup> Loy, 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!', *LLB82*, pp. 319-320.

then tramp through every street'.<sup>605</sup> This section was not included in Conover's selections from 'Colossus'. Loy often revised prose manuscripts by removing or adding words and sentences. Therefore, it is possible that these two slightly different versions of the same paragraph are from different manuscript drafts of 'Colossus'.

The decision to remove Cravan's remarks about New York in the *New York Dada* version seems obvious. It would be ironic to register Cravan's feeling of New York having shrunk physically or intellectually in a book meant to celebrate New York's artist culture. Instead, Conover chose to include the following section, which was omitted from 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!':

Of course at that time I knew almost nothing of Colossus' life, but when we became lovers he confided to me as nearly as is possible every moment of his experience. He required, it seemed, a witness to his reserve, a companion insofar as a companion served to measure the degree of his aloofness. He sometimes insinuated the impression that rather than accepting companionship, he felt his footsteps were being dogged. New York, as he wandered through it, reduced under his devouring stride to a garbage dump on which the works of man were regenerated in the poetry of his appreciation.<sup>606</sup>

In this excerpt, it is Cravan's 'devouring stride' that 'reduce[s]' New York, and not the city in itself that disappoints. Instead New York is a fertile 'garbage dump'; the city produces and allows Cravan to produce. 'Colossus' also mentions specific places in New York City as 'the greatest' of Cravan's 'pleasures': 'the Museum of Natural History, the Aquarium, Central Park, [and] the Hudson River'.<sup>607</sup> These specifics were excluded from 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' Possibly, the editor's interest in creating a version of 'Colossus' for *New York Dada* was to glorify New York's importance to Cravan's oeuvre.

In 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' Loy refers to Cravan by name rather than by his pseudonym. In 'Colossus', Loy only breaks from calling him Colossus once:

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<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Loy, 'Colossus', *NYD*, p. 111.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

This I know—that Cravan meant by the “eternal quality” the poet’s obligation to augment through his own knowledge the value of the universal essentials, of which he knew himself to be one exponent and which his entire life was constructed to preserve.<sup>608</sup>

The *LLB82* version reads:

This I know—that Cravan coveted glory as a magpie might—because brilliance caused the pupils of his eyes to contract. He had only found with the whole of mankind that brilliance is the touchstone of existence. Thus he meant by the “eternal quality” the poet’s obligation to augment through his own participation the value of the universal essentials.<sup>609</sup>

Which interested Cravan more, ‘glory’ or ‘the value of universal essentials’? If ‘brilliance is the touchstone of existence’ then was Cravan’s interest in the ‘poet’s obligation’ or his own reputation? Each version suggests opposing reasons for Cravan wanting that ‘eternal quality’. The appearance of Cravan’s name instead of Colossus also supports the theory that Loy revised her ‘Colossus’ manuscript with notes originally written about ‘Cravan’. The absence of the ‘Colossus’ manuscript from Loy’s archived papers makes it impossible to know which portions belong to which version. It is similarly difficult to imagine the transformation of Loy’s writings about Cravan from notes into a prose narrative. However, readers can get a sense of the consistency of Loy’s image of Cravan from ‘Arthur Cravan is Alive!’ to ‘Colossus’. If, as Conover states, ‘Colossus’ is ‘Arthur Cravan Undressed’, then ‘Arthur Cravan is Alive!’ is Cravan dressed in the superhumanising garb of the genius.

*New York Dada* also includes an essay by Willard Bohn entitled ‘Chasing Butterflies with Arthur Cravan’. Bohn, an American scholar of modernism, takes his title from a letter Cravan sent from Barcelona to the art dealer André Level. In that 1916 letter to Level, Cravan tells him of his plans to travel to South America.

What will I do there? I can only reply that I will be going to see the butterflies. Perhaps it is absurd, ridiculous, impractical, but it is stronger than I, and if I

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<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Loy, ‘Arthur Cravan is Alive!’, *LLB82*, p. 320.

have perhaps some worth as a poet, it is precisely because I have irrational passions, excessive needs; I would like to see spring in Peru, to make friends with a giraffe, and when I read in the *Petit Larousse* that the Amazon is 6,420 kilometers long and has the largest volume in the world, it has such an effect on me that I cannot even express it in prose.<sup>610</sup>

Bohn writes of this letter that it depicts Cravan's cultivated image of a 'Promethean individualist who would triumph, not only *in spite* of society, but by deliberately violating its most cherished rules'.<sup>611</sup> Bohn singles him out as the 'great precursor of Dada' because Cravan rejected society's rules with 'the same ethical and aesthetic stance' under which Dadaism operated.<sup>612</sup> Bohn concludes that '[d]oubtless [Cravan's] arrival in New York the following year represented the partial fulfilment of his dream'.<sup>613</sup> But even the excitement and freedom of New York seems to have left something to desire. Before long, Cravan found himself on the move again, heading South in search of his elusive butterflies, on a journey he would never finish'.<sup>614</sup> In reality, Cravan headed south to dodge conscription, not in search of butterflies, or for that matter to 'make friends with a giraffe'.<sup>615</sup> Bohn depicts Cravan as a wistful gypsy whose instabilities embody the aesthetic fancies of Dadaist practice. He calls him 'an eccentric among eccentrics' and a 'legend' for adopting 'the ultimate Dada gesture' before Dada even existed, which was to 'refuse to distinguish between art and life'.<sup>616</sup>

Alan Young writes in *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (1981):

Cravan's preference for 'life' (especially the athletic life) to art, expressed with a certain wild panache, has endeared him to many Dada and post-Dada writers, including André Breton and Hans Richter, and his temperament and life-style attracted Picabia too. This attractiveness seems to have come as much from his

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<sup>610</sup> Willard Bohn, 'Chasing Butterflies with Arthur Cravan', in *NYD*, pp. 120-123 (p.121).

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

colourful personality, and his capacity for living in the way he chose, as from his thorough contempt for most contemporary art and artists.<sup>617</sup>

Young's unwitting pun, Cravan's 'preference for "life" 'to art' 'with a certain wild panache' plays on Wilde's anti-critic dictum: 'It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors'.<sup>618</sup> Cravan's life would be immortalised by the critic-spectator (Breton and Picabia are obvious examples), who would also translate that life into a kind of 'art'. Richter himself wrote that 'because [Cravan] lived wholly according to his nature, wholly without constraint, and paid the full price, which is death, he became a nihilist hero in an age already long beset by nihilism'.<sup>619</sup> What few critics mention are Cravan's writings and if they are potentially 'pre-Dada'. Even Loy neglects to discuss his work. Cravan is perceived by contemporary audiences much in the same way as the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Both of these early twentieth-century writers are remembered for their outlandish behaviour, both were remembered as 'living' Dada, and both the Baroness's and Cravan's writings are difficult to find and very often are obscured by the foregrounded personalities of these 'eccentric' authors.

In 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!' Loy writes:

At such times as one is profound one regrets him as an irreparable deduction from the sum-total of the universal progression—and at such times as one is proportioned to the common commensuration—one wonders if "oneself" has not invented him out of a boisterous *blagueur* remaining in the superficial memory.<sup>620</sup>

It would be useful to be able to contextualise this fragment. If Loy included the above passage in the 'Colossus' manuscript then it reveals her problematising her authorial position and creating distance from herself with the third-person 'oneself'. From this excerpt, it appears that Loy momentarily doubts her own memory and that she wonders

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<sup>617</sup> Alan Young, *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 10.

<sup>618</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. and introduced by Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xxiii.

<sup>619</sup> Hans Richter quoted in Young, p. 11.

<sup>620</sup> Loy, 'Arthur Cravan is Alive!', *LLB82*, p. 318.



whether she has not ‘invented’ the image she presents of Cravan in ‘Colossus’. Loy deliberates as to whether or not Cravan’s ‘greatness’ results from the distortions of time or if his loss is so keenly and ‘universally’ felt simply because of her own emotional state. However, if this sentence appears in notes or as marginalia then it could provide the reader with an added insight into Loy’s struggle between her own memories and Cravan’s competing mythic legacy. Clearly in Loy’s writing about Cravan, she places both herself and her husband as central figures within her retold (and perhaps dramatised) memories. Through her writing of ‘Colossus’ Loy is as much accounting for her public relationship with Cravan as she is attempting to document his ‘true’ character. Loy’s possible goal, to control Cravan’s mythology while protecting her own, distorts both figures in proportion to their mythologized relationship. The arc of Loy’s (partly) self-fashioned widowhood and her various elegiac writings about Cravan perhaps mirror Loy’s intentions during the revising of her autobiographies. She seems to be increasingly concerned with providing ‘life evidence’ for the formation of both her and Cravan’s genius and she relies on prophetic moments to illustrate her fate.

In a recent article, Charles Nicholl attempts to shed light on Cravan’s life and disappearance. He argues that ‘[a]t its best, Cravan’s writing has a wayward brilliance, but probably his greatest creation was himself, or at least the deeply dodgy persona he presented to the public’.<sup>621</sup> Sixty years earlier, Breton wrote of Cravan’s posthumously published text ‘Notes’ (1945) that they depict ‘the atmosphere of pure genius, a genius unrefined—à l’ état brut’.<sup>622</sup> Loy carefully released Cravan’s few surviving manuscripts and published them reluctantly. According to Burke, Loy wrote that Cravan would have been ‘enraged’ at being ‘appropriated by the Surrealists’.<sup>623</sup> Breton’s enthusiasm for

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<sup>621</sup> Nicholl, p. 8.

<sup>622</sup> Breton, Andre, ‘Introduction to Cravan’s “Notes”’, in *VVV* (June 1942), p. 55, cited in Burke, p. 401.

<sup>623</sup> Burke, p. 401. Burke does not cite a source for this quotation.

Cravan's 'genius' arguably fuelled little more than an aesthetic 'climate', but evidence of Cravan's literary legacy is sparse and unsubstantiated.

Antonia Logue's fictionalised account of Cravan and Loy's romance, entitled *Shadow-Box* (1999), builds on the pair's mythic status. The novel is a series of biographical exchanges between Loy and the American boxer Jack Johnson in the form of imagined epistles (the two in fact never met nor did they ever correspond). Essentially Logue constructs Loy's 'letters' by rewriting Burke's biography in a first-person narrative. Loy's 'voice' in *Shadow-Box* is so unconvincing that Logue could not have read Loy's archived prose manuscripts or many of her letters first-hand. Jack Johnson and Cravan's characterisations are similarly hackneyed and rely on myths and stereotypes to bring these 'figures' into dialogue. Loy writes to Jack Johnson in *Shadow-Box*:

These days, Jack, they have made Fabian into a fool. Dada this and that, when he would have had no truck with any of it. He despised the hijacking of art into orthodoxy, he thought it all utterly foolish and self-indulgent. Now Marcel has pitched him as a Dadaist hero as though it were the finest epitaph he could have. [...] I have written a lot to try and make sense of his loss. Many poems that begin as ideas and mutate, but they have been gathered now, published as a book. No one has noticed it, no one besides my friends, my family. I don't mind. I never wanted to be like Bill [Williams], that is for him to enjoy. People read as they choose. If they choose not to read me, it is because they don't want to, or do not know I exist. Either way, Jack, I am not bothered unduly.<sup>624</sup>

Anyone familiar with Loy's prose style would immediately take issue with Logue's use of the phrase 'he would have had no truck with any of it' or the word 'orthodoxy', which never shows up in Loy's writing. In addition to Logue's puppeteering, she accentuates Loy's relative obscurity compared to Cravan's conditional fame as the 'Dadaist hero' and 'fool'. Logue inadvertently raises an interesting point through her comparison. It would not be until much later, roughly twenty years, that Loy's myth would begin to compete with Cravan's steadily concretised iconicity. Also, Loy's

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<sup>624</sup> Antonia Logue, *Shadow-Box* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), pp. 279-280.

eventual cult status as a marginalised modernist poet would depend on the reconsideration of her writing, and her influence on the work of poets writing both during and after her lifetime.

In his introduction to *4 Dada Suicides*, Conover prefaces a selection of Cravan's work with a caution:

It is tempting to do this: to consider [Cravan's] case in the context of other blurred lives, exceptional accidents and alter-artists like Arthur Rimbaud, B. Traven, Ret Marut, Hal Croves, Ambrose Bierce, William Herman Rulofson, Roland Barthes, Thomas Chatterton, Felix-Paul Greve, Stéphane Mallarmé, Jean Genet, Raymond Roussel, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Georges Bataille, Alfred Jarry, Anna [sic] Tsvetaeva, Guy Debord, Jean-Jacques Lequeu, Francesco Colonna, Francois Villon, Gérard de Nerval, Paul Verlaine, Baron Corvo, Frederick William Rolfe, Dominique Aury, Pauline Réage, Comte de Lautréamont, Isidore Ducasse, Charles Lassailly, Jacques Rigaut, Jacques Vaché, and Julien Torma. But this is to give him a home, to fix him a place, and to assimilate his identity into a curriculum. Is this to respect the freedom of this angel-criminal, or to trap him? Canon is the cage he escaped. That is why he is still at large.

Coming suddenly upon a spider spinning an absorbing web around the chrysalis of a butterfly this morning, I watched it.<sup>625</sup>

Conover suggests that publishing Cravan and considering his work alongside, among others, Jacques Rigaut, Julien Torma and Jacques Vaché leads to Cravan being canonised, assimilated into a 'curriculum', and 'trapped'. The 'canon' is not the 'cage [Cravan] escaped'. Although Cravan's 'place' in literary history is not as part of the canon, he has been relegated to a mythic undercurrent and his work has been largely ignored. He is 'still at large' because scholars have neglected to account fully for Cravan's influence on writing and art in the latter half of the twentieth century. Conover places Cravan in an alternative canon, one formed by his own tastes and editorial decisions. There seems no other clear connection between these 'alter-artists' than Conover's desire to create a rebellious counter-canon; his list equates 'exceptional' artists with 'marginal' figures, and many of the writers listed above could be seen as

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<sup>625</sup> Conover, 'Arthur Cravan by Roger Lloyd Conover', in *4 Dada*, pp. 12-27 (p. 27).

‘traditionally’ canonical. In the ‘case’ of Mina Loy’s writing, critics might discern her aesthetic lineage among more contemporary poets, such as E.E. Cummings, Kenneth Rexroth, Denise Levertov, to name only a few. Cravan’s real ‘cage’ is scholars’ inability to consider his writing without mythologizing his life as the ‘angel-criminal’ or as the bound ‘butterfly’.

## Chapter Six

### *Insel and the Modern Genius*

Robert McAlmon's *Being Geniuses Together: 1920-1930* (1938), an autobiographical account of the literary scene of London and Paris in the 1920s, reproduces a letter McAlmon received from T.S. Eliot in 1921. In the letter, Eliot distinguishes between their fellow American poets, or 'compatriots', as either having 'genius' or being merely clever.<sup>626</sup> He writes that Scofield Thayer's 'language is so opaque, through his cleverness, that it is unintelligible gibberish' and that E.E. Cummings is guilty of Thayer's 'exasperating vice'.<sup>627</sup> Eliot attacks those writers whose aesthetics he believes wilfully obfuscate meaning. However, he singles James Joyce out for his 'genius':

Joyce I admire as a person who seems independent of outside stimulus, and who therefore is likely to go on producing first rate work until he dies. [...] But Joyce has form—immensely careful. And as for literary—one of the last things he sent me contains a marvellous parody of nearly every style in English prose from 1600 to the *Daily Mail*. One needs a pretty considerable knowledge of English literature to understand it. No! you can't generalize, in the end it is a question of whether a man has genius and can do what he sets out to do. Small formulas support small people. Aren't the arty aesthetics you mention simply people without brains?<sup>628</sup>

In part, Eliot's claim about Joyce's genius is dependent on his ability to harness it and 'do [in his writing] what he sets out to do'. He gauges Joyce's genius in terms of his capacity to think and write 'independent of outside stimulus'. In other words, genius has a particular autonomy; Eliot valorises the innate quality of genius and downplays the significance of external 'stimulus' to a writer's process. He also writes to McAlmon that if he 'came to Paris the first thing to do would be to cut [himself] off from it, and not

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<sup>626</sup> Robert McAlmon, *Being Geniuses Together: 1920-1930*, revised by Kay Boyle (New York: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 8-9. Originally published in 1938.

<sup>627</sup> McAlmon, pp. 8-9.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

depend on it'.<sup>629</sup> It seems likely that Eliot distrusts the 'arty aesthetics' of the Paris coterie of expatriate writers, represented here in part by Thayer (editor of the American little magazine *The Dial*, which via Ezra Pound published poets of the European avant-garde) and Cummings (a regular contributor to *The Dial*).<sup>630</sup> Possibly, Eliot perceives Joyce as separate from the artistic shifts of such movement-driven circles. Joyce's uniqueness sets him apart from the literary fashion of 'isms'. Yet, he praises Joyce's parody, which ventriloquises the linguistic structures of English literature since the year 1600. Eliot's evaluation of Joyce's genius depends on the transcendence of an individual author's intention, to 'do what he sets out to do', over their historical moment. It appears from this seemingly contradictory definition that genius must be superior (to the point of aloofness) to its contemporaries and, at the same time, rooted in tradition.<sup>631</sup>

And if, according to Eliot's letter, a writer's value both lies in the possession of 'genius' and being able to 'do what [one] sets out to do', is a writer's genius dependent on his ability to produce, or can genius be evaluated separately from its products? To what standards of genius (and to what standards of success) is Eliot referring? Since he bases his estimations of each writer's ability on their works, it would seem that he determines genius through his readings of Thayer, Cummings and Joyce. This relationship between a creation and its creator, as one in which the text manifests genius, is problematized by the context of McAlmon's memoir. His jocular title, *Being Geniuses Together*, suggests that genius is an act or a mode of 'being' rather than a mode of production. McAlmon's book is composed mainly of retold meetings with

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<sup>629</sup> Humphrey Carpenter's somewhat loose account of Eliot's dislike of Paris also cites Eliot's letter to McAlmon. See Carpenter, *Geniuses Together: American Writers in Paris in the 1920s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), pp. 109-110.

<sup>630</sup> Walter Sutton has edited *The Dial* letters between Ezra Pound and Scofield Thayer. Those which concern Eliot and the publishing of *The Wasteland* by *The Dial* in the November 1922 issue are particularly interesting as a gauge of Thayer's and Eliot's relationship via Pound. See pp. 199-240. In *Pound, Thayer, Watson, and The Dial: A Story in Letters*, ed. by Walter Sutton (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).

<sup>631</sup> This is, of course, consistent with Eliot's essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

writers such as Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy (whose first collection of poetry he published in 1923). Of these figures, some of which are now canonical, he writes:

...and, of course, as regards those of whom I am writing, no one had become an acclaimed 'great man' or 'genius'. There might have been slumbering envies and animosities, but Paris lulled them, and each knew that not only he but others had to struggle for recognition of any proper sort.<sup>632</sup>

McAlmon's title betrays the ambition among members of his circle to secure the status of genius. Those who want to be seen as geniuses compete and 'struggle' to be recognised—it is the collective act of desiring genius through their writing that brings McAlmon's historical characters together. Yet Eliot's textual evaluations of genius alongside McAlmon's narratives of 'lived' genius raise a question central to the evolution of the genius within modernism. How are both conceptions of genius situated within a larger history of 'genius'?

In *Gender and Genius*, Christine Battersby writes:

At the start of the eighteenth century [genius] meant the special and unique talents that all (or most) individuals possess. By the end of the century, it had come to be closely linked to human creativity. It was creativity, not reason or talent, that made man resemble a god [...] This special spark of divinity was confined to *some few* individuals. The élitist way of talking about genius became a commonplace of the nineteenth century, and was dominant up to the Second World War.<sup>633</sup>

Certainly, a shift in the meaning of genius from a protective or 'tutelary spirit' to individual uniqueness is staged primarily within the nineteenth century.<sup>634</sup> Studies of genius point to 'key' Romantic texts on individual genius, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817), and even to nineteenth-century literary magazines and the press to determine ideas about genius in the public imagination.

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<sup>632</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>633</sup> Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>634</sup> Penelope Murray, *Genius: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 2-7.

David Higgins argues that genius is ‘socially constructed’ and that Romantic genius’s model of the ‘transcendent author’, one who separates himself from the external world by (and during) the act of creation, is ‘no doubt, a fantasy’ but ‘not one that we can easily analyse out of existence’.<sup>635</sup> Indeed, Higgins stresses that it is not the solitary artist, but ‘the valorizing activities of critics, academics, publishers’ that secure the artist’s ‘long-term literary reputation’ that construct genius.<sup>636</sup> The ‘evaluative judgements’ involved in enshrining genius are not objective, they depend on the existing standards of the tradition in which the work occurs. As Battersby argues, often genius can be said to disrupt ‘the tradition of which s/he is a part’.<sup>637</sup> However, the biographical link between a genius’s work and their life has been central to modern constructions of genius. Scientific evaluations and ‘measures’ of individual genius, such as Francis Galton’s *Hereditary Genius* (1869) and Cesare Lombroso’s *The Man of Genius* (1863), differently link heredity and biology to aberrations of human behaviour and intellectual ability. It is central to Battersby’s argument that genius has been historically attributed to men, and ‘maleness’. Although geniuses may be capable of intellectual ‘births’ and their ‘sensitive’ and ‘emotive’ natures may liken them to women, the autonomous ‘seed’ of inspiration is decidedly male.<sup>638</sup> Indeed, woman is conceived as the polar opposite to the ‘great man’ of genius, in the same way that the genius is superior to the ‘masses’.<sup>639</sup>

If Romanticism ‘relies on a logic of exclusion’, and the nineteenth-century masses were ‘given a female gender’, then there would be no alternative for the female creator but to fall into a definition of genius that is gendered male.<sup>640</sup> Simone de

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<sup>635</sup> David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Battersby, p. 124.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid., p. 6.



Beauvoir does little to eschew the male standard of genius; she praises Virginia Woolf, Emily Bronte and Katherine Mansfield, but argues ultimately that there have been no women geniuses. In *The Second Sex*, she writes:

The men that we call great are those who – in one way or another – have taken the weight of the world upon their shoulders; they have done better or worse, they have succeeded in re-creating it or they have gone down; but first they have assumed that enormous burden. This is what no woman has ever done, what none has ever been *able* to do. To regard the universe as one's own, to consider oneself to blame for its faults and to glory in its progress, one must belong to the caste of the privileged [...] It is in man and not in woman that it has hitherto been possible for Man to be incarnated. For the individuals who seem to us most outstanding, who are honoured with the name of genius, are those who have proposed to enact the fate of all humanity in their personal existences, and no woman has believed herself authorized to do this'.<sup>641</sup>

Feminist critics have challenged de Beauvoir's problematic construction of 'Woman' as always 'Other', and Battersby points out that de Beauvoir's title itself alludes to a Romantic ideal of masculine separateness.<sup>642</sup> What is interesting about de Beauvoir's argument is that she predicates genius on an artist's ability to 'enact the fate of all humanity'. A genius is 'man' (a gendered individual) and 'Man' ('everyman') at the same time. This assumption presupposes that when 'Art' speaks for 'all' mankind, it is speaking really for a male audience. She concludes:

When at last it will be possible for every human being thus to set *his* pride beyond the sexual differentiation [...] then only will woman be able to identify her personal history, her problems, her doubts, her hopes, with those of humanity; then only will she be able to seek in her life and her works to reveal the whole of reality and not merely her personal self. As long as she still has to struggle to become a human being, she cannot become a creator.<sup>643</sup> (my emphasis)

According to the quotation above, woman can only become a 'human being' and a 'creator' ('merely her personal self') when she angles her identity in line with a masculine normal. One difficulty with de Beauvoir's standard of genius is her insistence

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<sup>641</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949) (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 722.

<sup>642</sup> Battersby, p. 107.

<sup>643</sup> de Beauvoir, pp. 722-723.

that the author's biographical self translates directly into their creative product, and that (male or female) a work of genius implies that its author is a genius also. To a certain degree this may be true, but such an assumption excludes the possibility that geniuses may create their authorial 'selves' through their writing. The author genius becomes a monolithic hero of 'humanity', who transmits his or her identity in an unmediated 'truthful' way. The following sections demonstrate how early twentieth-century models of genius are as much performed as they were 'scientifically' evaluated. In fact, Mina Loy's writing, like McAlmon's, demonstrates an awareness of the biological and aesthetic determinations of genius. Loy's estimations of genius are steeped in the knowledge that genius is as much self-determined as it is socially upheld.

### The Artist Genius and the Divine

Published in the same year as McAlmon's memoir, Gertrude Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography* (1938) manipulates the relationship between autobiography, identity, genius and celebrity. *Everybody's Autobiography* (hereafter referred to as *EA*) is as much a traditional autobiographical narrative, shaped by the remembered events of Stein's past, as it is a meta-autobiography, an analysis of the first-person, self-reflexive 'I' constituted in the autobiographical act. Stein refers to her own genius several times and each time she reflects on what being a genius means from the 'inside' (self-identified) and from the 'outside' (identified by others).<sup>644</sup> In *EA*, Stein recounts the moment she realised that she was a 'genius':

Slowly and in a way, it was not astonishing but slowly I was knowing that I was a genius and it was happening and I did not say anything but I was almost ready to begin to say something. My brother began saying something and this is what he said.

He said it was not it it was I. If I was not there to be there with what I did then what I did would not be what it was. In other words if no one knew me actually then the things I did would not be what they were.

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<sup>644</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1938), pp. 67-68.

[...]

It is funny this thing of being a genius, there is no reason for it, there is no reason that it should be you and should not have been him [Stein's brother Leo]...<sup>645</sup>

It is significant that although Stein 'knows' she is a genius, the actual declaration of her genius comes from an outside source, her brother, who, according to Stein, is not one. On its own, genius is a meaningless entity; it is 'not it', or non-existent, without Stein's presence: 'it was I'. Genius requires an anchoring identity, but it also needs Stein to be known and named a 'genius' by others. It seems only to exist when both an artist and their audience are in agreement and when the artist's product stands before the spectator and it can be attributed to its creator. In the same breath Stein downplays and mystifies 'being a genius': according to her 'there is no reason' for its random bestowal on one rather than on another. In a later section of *EA*, Stein meditates on the nature of genius further:

Really inside you if you are a genius there is nothing inside you that makes you really different to yourself inside you than those are to themselves inside them who are not a genius, that is so.

[...]

What is a genius. If you are one how do you know you are one. It is not a conviction lots of people are convinced they are one sometimes in the course of their living but they are not one and what is the difference between being not one and being one. There is of course a difference but what is it.

And if you stop writing if you are a genius and you have stopped writing are you still one if you have stopped writing. I do wonder about that thing.<sup>646</sup>

Ultimately Stein decides that it is not one's being 'convinced' of their own genius nor is it the act of writing that maintains the status of the artist genius. Stein's reiterative argument evades an answer and her dialogic style invites the reader to evaluate her genius in the text she offers as a performance of genius. *EA* narrates Stein's lecture tour

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<sup>645</sup> Stein, pp. 60-61.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid, pp. 67-68.

through America; her position as a celebrity within her own narrative self-consciously anticipates her audience's reception. In other words, the question of whether she is a genius depends on her methodically recounted 'acts' of genius. She is as playful with her 'identity' as she is with the purpose of her autobiography, which are alternatively foregrounded or relegated to her sub-narrative of 'selfhood'. She renounces the 'work' of genius by stating that it 'takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing really doing nothing'.<sup>647</sup> Barbara Will contends that genius 'is the term that differentiates Stein from her audience, and that marks the legitimation of her aesthetic "difficulty", yet "genius" is also the key term for Stein to describe the relationship between writer and reader as they share in the experience of the modernist composition'.<sup>648</sup> I would argue for a less generous reading of *EA*. In writing 'everybody's autobiography', Stein simultaneously releases the potentiality of genius to her audience whilst subverting herself as a definable (and available) subject within her text. In doing so, she neutralises the reciprocal relationship that Will suggests she 'shares' with her audience. Stein's suggestion that genius requires a fixable identity for 'it' to exist dissipates the notion of shared genius and transforms it into something ephemeral and mortal.

Loy returned to ideas about genius and the status of the artist genius throughout her career. Her attitude towards genius shifts considerably over a span of thirty years, beginning with her socio-political treatise 'International Psycho-Democracy' (ca. 1918-1920), her poems from the 1920s of which 'Apology of Genius' (1922) is the most well-known, to her later autobiographical prose works, namely her novel *Insel* (ca. 1936-1940s). Although Loy does not attribute her notions of genius to any literary

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>648</sup> Barbara Will, *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of "Genius"* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 1-2.

source, her figure of the genius remains consistent throughout her writing.<sup>649</sup> Historical elements of genius as a superior human ideal characteristic found among a privileged few inform Loy's image of the genius, in particular a late eighteenth-century replacement of individual genius with earlier figures of the hero, the saint or the universal man.<sup>650</sup> Loy's genius figure appears in similar incarnations, some of which are: the embryonic child genius; the prophet or mystic genius; the god-like cultivator; or the racial scion of genius. All of these have in common their bodily experience of genius through which they transcend bodily existence. Often in Loy's writing, her geniuses receive inspiration from an external, universal force, which is conducted through their body via their senses or, in the case of Jewish genius, their genetics. They never contain genius as something that is uniquely their own; it is inherited or bestowed on them as a result of their receptivity. That is not to say that Loy's geniuses are conduits alone. 'International Psycho-Democracy', like 'Aphorisms on Futurism', exhorts artists to further the evolution of modern society and instructs readers to be guided by the artist genius's aesthetic rather than the militaristic principles of post-World War I politicians.

Begun in 1918, while Loy was in Buenos Aires and completed in Geneva in the climate of post-war reformation, 'Psycho-Democracy' is made up of a series of tenets by which her 'International Psycho-Democratic Party' would propose mankind govern itself.<sup>651</sup> Loy writes:

Our purpose is **the instatement of Actual Values** to destroy the **power**—inimical to man—**of those things he does not understand**. Our party stands for the redemption of the Intellect from the hypnotism of Education and the Press, for the new system of Experimental Ideative Exchange, and for the **Indication**

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<sup>649</sup> Loy refers to eugenics; it is likely she would have been familiar with Sir Francis Galton's writings, or read *Hereditary Genius*.

<sup>650</sup> Murray, p. 7.

<sup>651</sup> Loy, 'International Psycho-Democracy', *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (Highlands, N.C.: Jargon Society, 1982), pp. 276-282 (p. 276). (Hereafter cites as *LLB82*). See Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996), pp. 279-280 for information about Loy's travels during the composition of 'International Psycho-Democracy'.

of **Explorative Being**. Our intent is to **reproach the Heroic Personification of Man as Denominator of the Elements** until those elements are at the disposal of every man, to his greatest advantage, to his least inconvenience; and to inspire the leisure requisite to the human organism in its progressive racial conquest of consciousness.<sup>652</sup>

Loy's proposition for a new human order is based on a 'redemption of the Intellect' from institutionalised modes of knowledge such as education. In an earlier essay, she describes education as 'recognizing something that has been seen before' and confirms that the artist has an intrinsic 'pure, uneducated [way of] seeing'.<sup>653</sup> As an artist herself, Loy sets out her 'democratic' plan in 'International Psycho-Democracy' from an artist's perspective; she urges the common man: '[m]ake the world your Salon'.<sup>654</sup> Her self-admittedly 'nebulous' principles for social evolution depend on the reclamation of each individual's 'imagination'.<sup>655</sup> 'The Psycho-Democrat' is 'Man, Woman, Child of good sense and with imagination, having a normal love of Life and sympathetic indifference to their neighbor's obligations'.<sup>656</sup> Loy does not openly advocate the empowerment of geniuses, nor does she suggest that they ought to be followed. The underlying scheme of her ideal society's enlightenment relies on a return to individuality, free from social or class constructs, one that precedes socialisation. She writes that 'The Aim of [an ideal] Society is the Perfection of Self' and that "'Self" is the covered entrance to Infinity'.<sup>657</sup> This 'infinite' and uneducated self is at the core of all of her genius figures. Loy self-published limited copies of her treatise and circulated them solely among the literati and the intellectual elite.<sup>658</sup> A recurring trope within Loy's meditations on genius is that she positions herself as herald to the masses, a prophet whose duty it is to spur on the intellectual evolution of mankind. However, this relationship is never a dialogue;

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>653</sup> Loy, 'The Artist and the Public', *LLB82*, p. 285.

<sup>654</sup> Loy, 'International Psycho-Democracy', *LLB82*, p. 276.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid., pp. 282-281.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>658</sup> Burke, p. 280.

Loy offers her text and does not involve herself beyond her authorial role. One senses from her tone that humanity's fate rests entirely on whether or not it chooses to listen.

Loy's figure of the artist as a god is most evident from her poetry about her fellow writer 'geniuses'. Loy's 'Apology of Genius' was written partly as a response to the censorship of *The Little Review* over its serialised publication of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1918-1921) and the ensuing US court case. 'Apology' was originally published in *The Dial* in 1922.<sup>659</sup> The poem's criticism of censorship is directed to the 'watchers of civilized wastes'.<sup>660</sup> These 'watchers' are not 'the masses' or the 'contaminating rabble' as it has been suggested.<sup>661</sup> Loy directs her attack at those who govern prohibitively and restrict artistic freedom. However, she elevates genius above the rest of Man, and suggests that although geniuses share mankind's mortal condition, they are superior:

You may give birth to us  
or marry us  
the chances of your flesh  
are not our destiny—

The cuirass of the soul  
still shines—  
And we are unaware  
if you confuse  
such brief  
corrosion with possession<sup>662</sup>

The 'flesh' relationship between the genius and the common man is, according to Loy, not enough of a contaminant to possess the genius's 'destiny'. The genius is 'ostracised' with 'God' and is 'beyond' the control of civilisation's laws. 'Apology of Genius' squarely portrays the genius as a god-like figure, and is less of an 'apology' than a depiction of martyrdom. Loy's geniuses (among whom she numbers herself by using

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<sup>659</sup> Conover, 'Notes on the Text', *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy* (New York: Noonday Press, 1996), p. 197. (Hereafter cited as *LLB96*).

<sup>660</sup> Loy, 'Apology of Genius', *LLB96*, pp. 77-78 (p. 77).

<sup>661</sup> Will, p. 6.

<sup>662</sup> Loy, 'Apology of Genius', *LLB96*, pp. 77-78.

the pronoun 'we') are 'sacerdotal clowns', or priest-like sufferers in 'pastures of poverty'.<sup>663</sup>

In the raw caverns of the Increate  
we forge the dusk of Chaos  
to that imperious jewellery of the Universe  
—the Beautiful—<sup>664</sup>

Loy's deific beings are not only so untouched by human society that they are pre-civilised; they inhabit the 'Increate' world before human existence. A society that is unable to see beyond the prohibitive laws of the 'censor's scythe' perceives the 'mystic' genius to be a 'criminal'.<sup>665</sup> Here Loy alludes to the persecution of religious heretics to support her assertion that geniuses are misunderstood by their fellow man. To the non-genius, Loy's gods are as 'delicate' as 'immortelles'.<sup>666</sup> Although immortelles are delicately textured, papery flowers, they are also everlasting and they retain their colour and shape in death. Loy's association of immortelles with genius suggests that despite their fragile appearance, her geniuses are immortal in terms of their influence and therefore exempt from the confines of human life and civilisation.<sup>667</sup> In his essay 'Mina Loy', published in *The Dial* in 1926, the American poet and critic Yvor Winters concluded that Loy's 'apology is in itself a proof of genius—and of a genius that rises from a level of emotion and attitude which is as nearly common human territory as one can ever expect to find in a poet'.<sup>668</sup> Winters praises Loy's poem as indicative of her genius but he also suggests that because genius rarely displays 'emotion' it is uncommonly 'human'. He does not cite any displays of emotion in Loy's poem. Perhaps Winters is referring to Loy's sympathy for herself and for her fellow geniuses, but 'Apology' casts the 'common human' as the adversary of the intellectual. One

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<sup>663</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

<sup>667</sup> Conover claims that often Loy wore immortelles in her hat. Possibly this was her private symbol of genius. See Conover, 'Notes on the Text', *LLB96*, p. 197.

<sup>668</sup> Yvor Winters, 'Mina Loy', *The Dial* (June 1926), 496-499 (p. 499).



would have to associate heavily with the plight of the ‘genius’ to feel included in the poem’s ‘level of emotion’.

Within the Loy archive is an unpublished, handwritten manuscript of ‘The Apology of Genius II’, a sequel to her original ‘Apology’, dated ‘Oct. 1930’.<sup>669</sup> The poem appears on nine letterhead pages from Loy’s Paris lampshade shop and does not appear to be a finished draft.<sup>670</sup> Loy seems to redraft similar stanzas over the nine pages, as in the lines: ‘Thus it is to us eventual/ Even to survive with god’. She redrafts this into: ‘Our Eventuality/ it is/ Even to survive with god’.<sup>671</sup> The revised stanza’s heavily enjambed line ‘it is’ sounds more definite than the original and the initial use of ‘Our’ declares immediately that the poem is written by a ‘genius’ for the ‘geniuses’. ‘Our’ takes control over the ‘eventuality’ of the genius’s survival, whereas ‘thus’ lacks volition. Loy’s sequel documents her original ‘Apology’’s predicament of the genius as ‘ostracised’ with ‘God’:

So is  
our eventuality  
Even to survive with god  
The over withdrawn  
Aristo –  
elate in elusion<sup>672</sup>

The genius is a god-like ‘Aristo[crat]’ who is ‘over withdrawn’ but exhilarated by escape from the common, mortal man. ‘Over withdrawn’ puns on ‘overdrawn’, meaning both penniless and exaggerated, and hints at the genius’s withdrawal from society. The underlying suggestion of these lines is that the genius is already in exile and so need not withdraw at all. Next to these three short stanzas of the poem, Loy has handwritten the word ‘Insel’:

So shall we loom

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<sup>669</sup> Mina Loy, ‘Apology of Genius II’, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature, Mina Loy Papers, MSS 6, box 5, folder 76. (Hereafter cited as YCAL).

<sup>670</sup> I have found no other study of Loy’s work that mentions this poem’s existence.

<sup>671</sup> Loy, ‘Apology of Genius II’, YCAL MSS 6, box 5, folder 76.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid.

In this monstrous coma  
of our completion –

[...]

that we should be consummate  
are consumed

[...]

elate in elusion  
of [pinned] intellection  
of the obvious – its face  
genius chooses no doubt  
of the obvious its face  
is genius solely insuspect<sup>673</sup>

How might these rough stanza variations be related to the subject matter of Loy's novel *Insel*, which she was writing also at that time? I discuss *Insel* in a later section, but it appears that these lines have in common a characterisation of genius as deathly or marked by fatalism. The 'loom[ing]' genius's 'monstrous coma' results from an ominous 'completion', the consummation of their consumption. Possibly this 'completion' and consumption are artistic and refer to finishing a piece of art for public viewing. These lines are followed by: 'Genius/ the jocular case knowledge - /or joculative case of intellect' –.<sup>674</sup> Loy later settles on the line 'genius is in jocular case'.<sup>675</sup> Perhaps Loy's line 'we should be consummate' suggests that her geniuses, who are punished, 'consumed', and lampooned by society, are the 'jocular case'.

Her repetition of the phrase 'cloud-brewing space' and the poem's focus on the division between man and god might also refer to a painting that hung in her apartment, painted by the real-life central figure in *Insel* (Richard Oelze). This painting, entitled *Expectation*, depicts a dense but potent sky and various expectant onlookers. Its message could be summarised in part by the final lines of 'Apology of Genius II':

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid.

the origin of evil  
- is vanity's envy of god – <sup>676</sup>

Loy's sequel is more foreboding than her original poem. Her second 'apology' offers no hope for the survival of geniuses' contributions or for their acceptance by society. The genius's indulgence, 'idle prerogative [sic]', and 'lazy perquisite' are a result of futile vanity rather than a desire to offer wisdom or beauty.<sup>677</sup>

To return to her earlier work, Loy's first published collection, *Lunar Baedeker* (1923), includes three poems under the heading '1921-1922', which are also presumably the poems' composition dates. 'Brancusi's Golden Bird', 'Joyce's Ulysses', and "'The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis' each refers by name to items featured in *The Little Review*, from a photograph of Constantin Brancusi's sculpture, to Joyce's serialised novel and a copy of Lewis's drawing.<sup>678</sup> These poems share with 'Apology of Genius' the language of creation mythologies, a near Biblical tone that depicts a masterful deity. 'Brancusi's Golden Bird' begins:

The toy  
become aesthetic archetype

As if  
some patient peasant God  
had rubbed and rubbed  
the Alpha and Omega  
of Form  
into a lump of metal<sup>679</sup>

His 'Golden Bird' is an ovoid sculpture that matches the principles of a bird's flight metaphorically rather than figuratively. In doing so, Brancusi has not only given the 'lump of metal' life. The expectation of sculpture is to liberate form from a formless medium, but Brancusi imbues his medium also with a metaphysical ideal. It is the ideal

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<sup>676</sup> Ibid.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid.

<sup>678</sup> Interestingly, Brancusi's sculpture, Joyce's manuscript of *Ulysses* and Lewis's drawing were also all part of John Quinn's collection. See Conover, 'Notes on the Text', *LLB96*, p. 202.

<sup>679</sup> Loy, 'Brancusi's Golden Bird', *LLB96*, pp. 79-80 (p. 79).

of flight, and not a 'bird', that constitutes what Loy calls his 'immaculate conception'.<sup>680</sup>

The absolute act  
of art  
conformed  
to continent sculpture  
—bare as the brow of Osiris—  
this breast of revelation<sup>681</sup>

The brow of Osiris—the Egyptian god of creation and immortality—is compared to the 'Bird's' smooth surface; it stands as a metaphor for Brancusi's role as 'absolute' creator. The 'act' of his creation must conform to the material of mortal life. However, this conformity does not debase the revelatory act of the artist genius. Photographs of Brancusi's Golden Bird first appeared in a 1921 issue of *The Little Review*, accompanied by an essay entitled 'Brancusi' written by Pound, whom Loy described as 'the purveyor of geniuses'.<sup>682</sup> Loy would certainly have read this issue, and perhaps had Pound's comment in mind while composing her poem, that it 'is perhaps no more impossible to give a vague idea of Brancusi's sculpture in words than to give it in photographs, but it is equally impossible to give an exact sculptural idea in either words or photography'.<sup>683</sup> At times, Loy's diction mimics her impression of Brancusi's sculpture; lines such as 'unwinged unplumed/ —the ultimate rhythm' have the hard exactitude and the assonant sonority of Brancusi's 'nucleus of flight'.<sup>684</sup> The language of creation combines with modes of transcendence—both the 'Bird' escapes from its 'lump of metal' and Brancusi ascends to the god-like 'act/ of art'.

For Loy, Joyce's writing of *Ulysses* draws similar comparisons with an immortal creator. In 'Joyce's Ulysses' she describes him as 'Master/ of meteoric idiom' who

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<sup>680</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>682</sup> Loy, 'Modern Poetry', *LLB96*, pp. 157-161 (p.158). Pound's essay appeared in *The Little Review*, 8.1 (Autumn 1921). Reprinted in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954, 1985), pp. 441-445.

<sup>683</sup> Pound, 'Brancusi', p. 441.

<sup>684</sup> Loy, 'Brancusi's Golden Bird', *LLB96*, p. 79.

‘present[s]/ The word made flesh’.<sup>685</sup> He is the poem’s rising sun, the ‘Phoenix/ of Irish fires’ whom Loy praises for giving light to the ‘Occident’ with his ‘Olympian prose’.<sup>686</sup>

Loy solidly affixes Joyce to the role of literary god in the lines:

Empyrean emporium  
where the  
rejector—recreator  
Joyce  
flashes the giant reflector  
on the sub rosa - - -<sup>687</sup>

The ‘empyrean emporium’ locates Joyce in the pantheons of both the literary elite and production. Throughout *Ulysses*’s metaphoric ‘impal[ing] of the human spirit on ‘the phallus’, he turns the pure light of heaven back down to the fleshly world of mortals, that private, sensuous ‘sub rosa’. Loy alliteratively equates ‘rejector’ with ‘recreator’ and argues that Joyce recreates Man by refusing moral and literary hygiene within his narrative of *Ulysses*’ ‘gravid day’.<sup>688</sup> Conover notes that Loy followed *The Little Review*’s trial over its serialised publication of *Ulysses* and that she met Joyce for the first time early in 1922, shortly after the first edition of his entire novel was published.<sup>689</sup> This is possibly the meeting described by Loy’s biographer Carolyn Burke, which took place in a Paris café in 1921. Loy sketched Joyce’s portrait while Djuna Barnes interviewed him for the Spring issue of *Vanity Fair*.<sup>690</sup> In June of 1922, Thayer wrote from Vienna to James Sibley Watson, Jr., who co-edited *The Dial*:

Mina [Loy] says she told Joyce she was just a real girl and Joyce was tickled to death. On the other hand Joyce did not take to Djuna [Barnes] and Bobby [Robert McAlmon] had to do considerable polishing to keep Djuna at all eligible. So you should try to be less like Djuna and more like Mina when you feel <up> Joyce.<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>685</sup> Loy, ‘Joyce’s Ulysses’, *LLB96*, pp. 88-90 (p. 89).

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>689</sup> Conover, ‘Notes on the Text’, *LLB96*, p. 201.

<sup>690</sup> Burke, pp. 310-311.

<sup>691</sup> Letter from Scofield Thayer to James Sibley Watson, June 1922, in *Pound, Thayer, Watson, and The Dial: A Story in Letters*, ed. by Walter Sutton (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), pp. 242-243 (p. 242). (Hereafter cited as *DL*).

Presumably, Thayer's advice is meant to aid Watson (who was in Paris at the time) to procure a contribution from Joyce, who only published once in *The Dial* in 1920.<sup>692</sup> It appears from Thayer's letter, and his caution to Watson, that Loy claimed that Joyce favoured her over Barnes. According to Barnes's biographer, Phillip Herring, Joyce and Barnes were friends and admirers of each other work. Apparently, he presented her with a bound proof-copy of *Ulysses*, just two weeks after it was published, inscribed: 'To Djuna Barnes, James Joyce, Paris 16 February 1922'.<sup>693</sup> Whether or not Loy claimed that Joyce preferred her to Barnes, what these letters and biographers' claims show is that an association with Joyce was much coveted at the time of *Ulysses* publication. Thayer's assertion, that McAlmon (whose attendance is not recorded in either Loy's or Barnes's biographies) 'had to do considerable polishing to keep Djuna at all eligible', borrows the diction of courtship and marital negotiations. Thayer insinuates that Loy charms Joyce by being 'just a real girl' and that she is not a threat to him. Similarly, Watson must seduce—or 'feel [Joyce] up'—if *The Dial* is to profit from the escalating celebrity of his genius. It is tempting to read Loy's poem as an investment in Joyce's reputation, whom she called the 'God of Paris'.<sup>694</sup> Her inclusion in her own title of Joyce's aligns them primarily through their artistic product, and not their acquaintance. She makes no hint of their friendship, and exhibits their kinship as writers (and geniuses) instead by explaining Joyce's vision.

Her poem, "'The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis', also praises Lewis's divine ability:

who raised  
these rocks of human mist

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<sup>692</sup> Sutton, 'Biographical Notes', *DL*, p. 354.

<sup>693</sup> Phillip Herring, *Djuna: The Life and Works of Djuna Barnes* (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 102. I have verified this information with the Houghton Library (Harvard), and copies of their acquisition record (dated 22 October 1952) indicate that Herring's information is correct. Barnes sold her personalised copy of *Ulysses* to the Houghton Library for 125 US dollars.

<sup>694</sup> Letter from Mina Loy to Nellie Grandjean, January 1922, quoted in Burke, p. 311.

pyramidical survivors  
in the cyclorama of space

In the  
austere theatre of the Infinite<sup>695</sup>

Like Loy's treatment of the 'Golden Bird' and *Ulysses*, 'The Starry Sky' alludes to the universal creative act of Genesis. Loy compares Lewis to the Biblical god, 'Jehovah's seven days/ err in your silent entrails/ of geometric Chimeras'.<sup>696</sup> Lewis's 'Sky' supersedes the Old Testament lore of the universe's' origin—'Jehovah's seven days' cannot appear to be anything but erroneous when compared to Lewis's masterful patterns.

Certainly, Loy's artist geniuses are exempt from the fallibilities of mankind, hence her ironic 'apology'. In many of her writings on genius, Loy appears to single out 'modern' genius from its more traditional predecessors; she suggests that modernity allows for a culmination of genius as both the subject and creator of their art. 'The Metaphysical Pattern in Aesthetics' is a brief, undated essay among Loy's unpublished papers in which she sets out the aesthetic differences between 'modern' artists and the 'old masters'.<sup>697</sup> In this uncorrected, typed draft she writes:

The pattern of awork [sic] of art is interposed between the artist's creation and the observer in the mode of a screen formed by the directing lines or map of the a [sic] artist's genius.<sup>698</sup>

She distinguishes between the art of the 'old masters', who superimpose their 'individuality' on their 'subject', and the 'modern', whose 'map of individuality' is without a formal 'secondary reconstruction'.<sup>699</sup> According to Loy:

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<sup>695</sup> Loy, "'The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis', *LLB96*, pp. 91-92 (p. 91).

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>697</sup> Loy, 'The Metaphysical Pattern in Aesthetics', YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 165, pp. 1-2 of typescript.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*

The intention of the modern movement is to liberate art from from [sic] the convention of pushing this individualistic aesthetic structure to a final [sic] pictorial conclusion.<sup>700</sup>

‘Modern’ art resists a distinguishable ‘pictorial’ representation of a subject. Instead the modern artist’s ‘genius’ is, in itself, both the subject and its representation. This liberates the modern from any expectation the observer might have of arriving at the artist’s intention, which is obscured by the ‘screen’ of their genius. Loy defines the ‘pattern’ of an artist’s genius as directly represented by their ‘work’. Unlike the ‘old master’, the modern need not rely on the ‘secondary reconstruction’ of their genius through a manipulation of the real. Modern geniuses rest squarely in the realm of their imagination. They are removed from the anchoring attributes of figurative representation, thereby bringing individual consciousness and perception to the fore. Therefore, the works of ‘modern’ geniuses cannot be judged separately from the artist: they are one. The obvious problem that arises is that assumptions about an artist’s ability supersede analyses of their art.

### The Genius of Childhood and Biography

Loy’s autobiographies explore the correlation between the mental potentiality of genius and the incipient consciousness of the child. In ‘The Child and the Parent’ (hereafter referred to as ‘Child’) she writes:

If we when undecided as to our relation to phenomena, at the mercy of mystery, fumble, the child brings absolute assurance to its maddening enterprises of destruction. When it approaches the bibelot, the candle, or anything else it is about to spoil, it comes upon it with the virtuosity of a past master—but in the name of Hermes of what art? The child seems to have the preconception of what it wills to create, which, at a later age, comes only to genius.<sup>701</sup>

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<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> Loy, ‘The Child and the Parent’, YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 60, p. 11 of typescript. (Hereafter cited as ‘Child’).



In the above quotation the confident child lords over matter in perfect 'relation' to whatever it sees. Although Loy cites the destructive power of the child's mastery, its willpower matches the genius's in its fearlessness and surety. Her ideas can be traced back to William Wordsworth's idealised child consciousness and to Charles Baudelaire, who writes that 'genius is no more than childhood recaptured at will, childhood equipped now with man's physical means to express itself, and with the analytical mind that enables it to bring order into the sum of experience'.<sup>702</sup> Loy continues this section from 'Child' in the 'Islands' manuscript:

Of what transformation of matter is the child presient [sic]?

[...]

The mystic tenacity with which it guards its seemingly idiotic treasures suggests that all religious wars and wrangles may originate in this infantile conviction of possessing the best magic.<sup>703</sup>

Between the writing of 'Child' and Loy's redrafting of her narrative into 'Islands' her attitude towards the child genius shifts. Whereas in 'Child' the infant's consciousness is admirably courageous (albeit destructive), in 'Islands' the monopolisation of objects, of 'idiotic treasures', and their control likens the child to a religious war-monger. The child's 'infantile conviction' conquers and hoards the spoils; geniuses, convinced of their mastery over art, compete in the same way as the 'mystic' is assured of 'possessing the best magic'.

Loy's partly autobiographical novel, *Insel* (1991) recounts her brief friendship with the surrealist painter Richard Oelze. *Insel's* narrative consists of a series of encounters between Mrs. Jones (the character based on Loy) and Insel (Oelze). Loy most likely began writing her novel between the years 1930 and 1936 while she was living in Paris and working as the European agent for Julien Levy's New York art

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<sup>702</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (1863), trans. by Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon Press, 1964), p. 398.

<sup>703</sup> Loy, 'Islands in the Air', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 63, pp. 48-49.

gallery.<sup>704</sup> Later typescript drafts, some with Loy's hand-written corrections, appear on American watermark paper.<sup>705</sup> It appears likely that Loy continued writing *Insel* after she moved back to New York in 1936. Early, fragmentary notes provide a picture of how the narrative was written; Loy seems to have written down (real or imagined) transcripts of conversations between her and Oelze. Handwritten drafts in Loy's archived papers suggest that before *Insel*, the tentative title of her novel was 'Totenkopf', translated literally from the German as 'death's head' or 'skull'.<sup>706</sup> Loy describes Insel as having the 'black-magicky' appearance of a surrealist.<sup>707</sup> She writes that his face is 'luminous from starvation' and 'will turn out to be a death's head after all'.<sup>708</sup> Insel's poverty is a key part of her narrative. It is usually Insel's need for food, money or shelter that initiates meetings with Mrs. Jones—she provides these necessities on behalf of Levy's gallery in order to prompt Insel to paint. However, throughout most of the narrative Insel does not successfully produce any paintings. He destroys his one attempt, *Die Irma*, because Mrs. Jones finds it repulsive.<sup>709</sup>

Despite Insel's lack of productivity, Mrs. Jones is fixated by his 'Strahlen' (rays) and describes his 'clochard' existence as a living act of genius.<sup>710</sup>

[Insel] told us, his gray eyes atwinkle with the inner security the possession of a strange surplus fortune, balancing destitution, gives to men of genius, he had solved the problem of keeping alive without any money and thus had lived for sixteen years.<sup>711</sup>

It is his lack of rootedness—to artistic production, recognition from his contemporaries, and to basic subsistence in terms of food and money—that make Insel, or 'island' in

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<sup>704</sup> Burke, p. 381.

<sup>705</sup> Loy, 'Insel', YCAL MSS 6, box 3, folders 40-57. These folders contain the 'second draft' and 'third draft' typescripts of *Insel*, labelled in Loy's handwriting. See Appendix for information of watermarks used in these drafts.

<sup>706</sup> Loy, 'Insel First Draft Fragments', YCAL MSS 6, box 3, folders 37-38.

<sup>707</sup> Loy, *Insel*, ed. by Elizabeth Arnold (Santa Rosa, CA.: Black Sparrow Press, 1991), p. 21.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

<sup>709</sup> Loy, *Insel*, pp. 130-135.

<sup>710</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 46 and p. 108.

<sup>711</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 23.

German, an appropriate choice of name for Loy's ethereal genius. Insel's few human features are that he craves women and beefsteaks, yet any kind of finery contrasts with the reality of his situation. Insel is by no means the god-like genius of Loy's early poems, nor is he depicted as heroic.

Only towards the close of his reminiscences did he seem to have shared a responsibility with normal men: 'They sent me to war,' [Insel] told us wryly, voicing that unconvincing complaint against their perpetual situation in the ridiculous made by people who, pleasing to laugh at themselves, one suspects of aiding destiny in detaining them there, 'in two left-foot boots, and,' trotting his fingers along the table in a swerve, 'the one *would* follow the other,' he explained as the mental eye also followed that earlier Insel—out of the ranks; on the march to a war that, at its blasting zenith, ceased to be war, for, in elaborating his martial adventures Insel turned out to have been taking part in a film.<sup>712</sup>

Not having been to war, Insel can only recount the performance of his failure to be 'normal'. Insel's story turns out to be false, which only becomes evident at the 'zenith' of his retelling. Mrs. Jones suggests that if Insel cannot paint, he should earn money by writing his biography. He makes several protests in order to avoid the undertaking:

'I am a painter,' he objected. 'It would take too long building a style.'  
'You'd only have to write the way you paint. Minutely, meticulously—like an ant! Can you remember every moment, every least incident of your life?'  
'All,' he replied decisively.  
'Then start at once.'  
'It would need so much careful editing. In the raw it would be scandalous—'  
'Scandalous,' I cried scandalized—'the truth? Anyway you can write under a pseudonym.'  
'People would recognize me'.  
'Don't you know anything of the world? The artist's vindication does not lie in "what happens to him" but in what shape he comes out.'  
'Oh,' said Insel disinhibiting, 'very well. It's not the material that is wanting,' he sighed wearily, 'the *stacks* of manuscript notes I have accumulated!'<sup>713</sup>

Mrs. Jones eventually offers to write Insel's biography for him from notes and conversations he should provide. What is most striking about the conversation (between Insel and Mrs. Jones) is that it already takes place within Insel's biography, *Insel*.

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<sup>712</sup> Loy, *Insel*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>713</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 31.

Although Insel suggests 'Flight from Doom' as the provisional title for his unwritten book, he provides little else and expects that in exchange for details about his life, Mrs. Jones will take him to America with her. It is not long before she discovers that not only is Insel wishing to imitate Kafka's *Der Prozess*, but that his 'stacks of manuscript notes' do not exist:

The first stage of Insel's intimacy completed, when he evidently intended to let you further 'in on' his show, he insisted on your reading Kafka, just as on assisting at a foreign opera one is handed a book of the words.

Study this well he tacitly commended. It will give you an angle of approach. 'In Kafka,' he explained, 'I found a foreshadowing of my hounded existence, recognized the relentless drive of my peculiar misfortune.'

*Der Prozess* was the volume he borrowed to lend me, and I lay awake reading on and on and on, curious for the book to begin, when, with one eye still open, I came upon the end to fall asleep in the unsatisfied certainty of having become acquainted with an undeniable, yet perhaps the most useless, genius who ever lived.

[...]

It was of no use to me. Flight from Doom, with its pattern of absurd destiny, had already been written.<sup>714</sup>

It is unclear from Burke's biography and from Loy's papers whether she was encouraged by Oelze to write his life story. *Insel* provides a meta-narrative of a story that is never written; 'Flight from Doom' is a failed project and Mrs. Jones leaves Insel behind and goes to live in America, just as France is under threat of invasion. Mrs. Jones herself escapes, and by the end of the novel has written her own autobiography instead of Insel's; she completes and usurps any hope she initially gave to Insel of a future. According to Loy, this is the 'artist's vindication'—to survive. And in reality it is of course Loy herself who transforms her 'stacks of manuscript notes' into a book about her own artistic life—these meticulously remembered 'least incidents'. Does her novel set up a rivalry between the two main characters—are they vying for recognition as a genius? In what terms does Loy define genius in *Insel*?

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<sup>714</sup> Loy, *Insel*, pp. 34-35.

There are additional similarities between Mrs. Jones's unwritten biography of Insel and Loy's own autobiographies. As she is conducting her interviews with Insel for 'Flight from Doom', Mrs. Jones considers whether perhaps the 'strain of this biography would consist in [Insel's] too facile superimposing of separate time—his reminiscences fitted about from one end of his life to the other'.<sup>715</sup> 'Child', 'Goy Israels' and 'Islands' each tackle this difficult teleological problem of memory 'superimposing' an older self on a narrated earlier 'self'. Unlike Loy, Insel cannot separate his adult self from his childhood memories and his memories are all too interpretative. Again, Loy seems to be airing another of the difficulties of writing her own autobiography—that of perspective. How much can one return to childhood without the interpretation of an older narrator? Loy's approach to the seemingly unsolvable problem of excluding the influence of hindsight from the act of remembering is to focus on only those details and events that she believes persist in her memory unchanged. In each of her autobiographies, she shifts her authorial position in order to retain various degrees of both intimacy and objectivity in relation to her subject. 'Child's' narrator treats her subject with the most distance and refers to her as 'the child', which also releases the child's personal experiences into the realm of greater symbolic weight. The child becomes all children—Loy makes herself into a kind of case study. 'Goy Israels' sees Loy take on a pseudonym so that she can safely foreground her bi-racial heritage without being identified. 'Goy Israels' is an imagined experiment in racial destinies that borrows heavily from 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose'. 'Islands' is the only version in which Loy uses the first person consistently. The move from a generalised third person to a pseudonym within her revisions, and then finally to the 'I' of 'Islands', suggests two possibilities. Either Loy became more willing to locate her narrative within the identity of a supposedly authorial self, or she realised that the most elusive of all disguises is the one that appears to have the most

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<sup>715</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 33.

truthful referentiality. By couching her narrated 'least incidents' in the voice of the autobiographical 'I', Loy appears to take apart and reassemble her own psychic evolution. In part, the model on which this reassembly is constituted is a likeness of what she describes as Insel's genius: the 'embryonic mind'.<sup>716</sup> Even Insel's body becomes that of an incipient being. Describing Insel's hands, Loy writes:

...[Insel's] fingers grew into the new sensibility of a younger generation, in his case excessive; his fingers clung together like a kind of pulpoid antennae, seemingly inert in their superfine sensibility, being aquiver with such miniscule vibrations they scarcely needed to move—fingers almost alarmingly fresh and pink for extremities of that bloodless carcass, the idle digits of some pampered daughter; and their fresh tips huddle together in collective instinct to more and more microscopically focus his infinitesimal touch. All the same, there was something unpleasantly embryonic about them. I had never seen anything that gave this impression of the cruel difficulty of coming apart since, in my babyhood, I had watched the freak in Barnum's circus unjoin the ominous limpness of the legs of his undeveloped twin.<sup>717</sup>

Compare this section with a similar passage from 'Islands', in which Loy recounts visiting Barnum's circus within a sequence of nightmares:

A youth in ruby plush lowers his shame-worn eyes to his abdomen, and handles the rubbery legs of his unborn twin which tend to cling together because the cramped heels of foeti are crossed. Over and over again he pulls the creasy limbs of a babe apart to inform the ticket holders. To me, in my sickening pity, it appeared that this half body had taken a premeditated plunge to stick half way in the process of becoming, rather than ripen for the butchery of conscious life. I ached with the fateful hatred of the Freak for those legs of annihilation taking their static leap into the lasting exposure of his modesty; the cleaving of his stricken abdominal muscles.

[...]

These peccadillos [sic] of Nature's moments of absentmindedness closely resemble deformations of the spirit.<sup>718</sup>

Insel's unnatural, foetus-like hands align him with the 'unborn twin' who, or so Loy imagines, wished to stay incipient to avoid the 'butchery of conscious life'. Although

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<sup>716</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 19. Loy describes Insel as 'dilapidated'.

<sup>717</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 141.

<sup>718</sup> Loy, 'Islands in the Air', 'Chapter VII, Ethics of Hygiene of Nightmare', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 63, pp. 55-84, (pp. 81-82 of typescript).

elements of the embryonic would seem to suggest possibility and potential, in both Insel and the 'Freak''s case such raw pinkness is ominously monstrous and self-annihilating because it refuses to enter into the natural world. Insel's embryonic state is in one sense generative and in another static. In both Mrs. Jones's and Insel's drawings, they attempt to depict a pre-creation state of the universe and matter. Explaining this pre-matter state to Insel, Mrs. Jones outlines how the artist goes about physically transcending the present to reach the divining point of the universe.

'I felt, if I were to go back, begin a universe all over again, forget all form I am familiar with, evoking a chaos from which I could draw forth incipient form, that at last the female brain might achieve an act of creation.'<sup>719</sup>

She acknowledges that the two of them commit this 'act of creation' in each of their work, albeit from their differently gendered perspectives. The desire for newness and for creation often ends in this sort of dilemma: how is it possible to 'forget all form' and recreate the universe? How can Insel be a genius if he never paints except in the 'galleries of the increate'? Mrs. Jones berates herself for her own lack of production:

'Yet whenever I get to work I come upon some fundamental obstacle. It takes me *hours*,' I complained to Insel, 'to remember it cannot be done. It is as if at the back of that memory stands another memory of having had the power to create whatever I pleased.'<sup>720</sup>

And this is genius—this 'power to create' that the child is intoxicated by and which the embryo represents in its mere pluripotent body. Mrs. Jones imagines she can hear Insel communicating mentally that his creative potential is greater than hers:

'To make things grow,' he conveyed on his silence, 'you would have to begin with the invisible dynamo of growth; it has the dimension of naught and the Power of Nature. As a rule it will only grow if planted in a woman—But *my brain* is a more exquisite manure. In that time in which I exist alone, I recover the Oceanic grain of life to let it run through my fingers, multiple as sand.'<sup>721</sup>

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<sup>719</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 37.

<sup>720</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 106.

<sup>721</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 107.

Mrs. Jones's fear, that secretly Insel believes he has greater generative power than her, results from the underlying competition between the two. Here, Insel is not only embryonic, he is also womb-like, and he receives the seed, the invisible 'dynamo of growth'. His fingers reappear as a feature of his creativity and of his embryonic multiplicity. Another instance in which Insel's hands are both the site of creation and of multiplicity is towards the end of Loy's novel, when she reflects on her own life story:

I had long ago worn down in contemplation of that multiplicity of direction. How *far* my mind had travelled; never to come to the *beginning* of any route. Surely, for Insel it should have been different—starting with the spectral spermatozoa that seeped from his brains through his gardening hands.

[...]

On the whole space [of Insel's unravelled brain] were only a few signboards on which grew hands, a live and beckoning.<sup>722</sup>

Slowly (over the course of Loy's narrative) Insel becomes a threat to Mrs. Jones. Loy writes that his 'mediumship concentrated in a sole manifestation' that 'interf[eres] with time'.<sup>723</sup> Through her meetings with Insel, Mrs. Jones loses her own sense of time and identity in his:

This alone was certain. It was absolutely engrossing to the mind, although nothing brief enough for us to cognize happened in this longer time, which occurred commensurately with the bit of lingering I was wedging in for Insel between contiguous hours in defiance of occupational time.<sup>724</sup>

The clocks are no longer governing their lives; Insel's surreal body and mind conjure up communal hallucinations and both he and Mrs. Jones become engrossed in their liaison. Insel's anecdotes about his past are 'as a prayer, repeated over and over, becoming autohypnotic'.<sup>725</sup>

As if with incantations [Insel] must summon up his past because some unimaginable impediment withheld the present and the future from him. His

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<sup>722</sup> Loy, *Insel*, pp. 174-175.

<sup>723</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 173.

<sup>724</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 174.

<sup>725</sup> Loy, *Insel*, pp. 67-68.



mind besieged the barred outlet of today-into-tomorrow in an effort to break it down and gather fresh material, but on finding itself impotent revoked to memory, dilating his souvenirs until for him the story of the universe was blotted out by the gigantism of his meagre individual experience.<sup>726</sup>

Insel is not admitted into the present or the future—his mind is ‘revoked to memory’—and as a result his past takes on monumental importance. For a man who has no ‘outlet’ into the future, his individuality becomes the only source on which his mind can focus, thus distorting his proportions to universal significance. This ‘dilation’ of self also occurs within Loy’s introduction to ‘Islands’, ‘Hurry’. The anxiety of being, and of the tension between the need to conceal and to simultaneously confess, stopper Loy’s stories in a way that Insel does not experience. Insel claims he has never known ‘ennui’, and says that simply being, and not necessarily producing, is ‘sufficient for us all’.<sup>727</sup> We soon learn that Insel’s fascination with ‘being’ emerges from an inability to create. He explains to Mrs Jones why he cannot work:

‘So often at dusk I come here to stare at that white canvas,’ he had told me dreamingly. ‘I see all the worlds I could paint upon it. But *um Himmels Willen!* Which one? I can create everything. Then what thing? A thousand directions are open to me, to take whichever I decide—I cannot decide.’<sup>728</sup>

Like Loy’s own Hurry, the force that counters experience and spurs her into creative panic, Insel’s ‘thousand directions’ are not actual avenues for genius. Instead, each of his ‘directions’ is another splintering of his perception into an ‘unrealizable journey’.<sup>729</sup> Mrs. Jones sees Insel as ‘rich in postponement’ during their last meeting. Of their parting and their common multiplicity, she writes:

...the thousand directions withdrew, leaving us at a destination.  
Nothingness.

It was not black as night nor white as day, nor gray as death—only a nonexistent irritation as to what *purposed in consequence* had led us into the illusion of ever having come into being.

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<sup>726</sup> Ibid.

<sup>727</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 140.

<sup>728</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 174.

<sup>729</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 175.

The haunting thing about Nothingness was that it knew we were *still there*—Two unmatched arrows sprung from its meaningless center—were surrounded by a numeral halo—I *had* to leave Insel, it was ten to eight.<sup>730</sup>

Duration returns; the ‘thousand directions’ dissolve and plant Insel and Mrs. Jones in the present moment. They become two hands of a clock, ‘arrows’ pointing in divergent directions. Once time is restored, Mrs. Jones can leave Insel and finish her own autobiography. Mrs. Jones must abandon Insel in order to come into the present, even if that present is ‘Nothingness’. Only then is she able to write her own life story. The ‘purposed in consequence’ of which Loy writes is reminiscent of her depiction of the child consciousness fascinated with the ‘being there of’ that which is ‘not there’.<sup>731</sup> But in order for Loy to ‘criticise her last incompleteness’ and finish her autobiography, she confronts Insel—and eventually regains control over her own identity and time.<sup>732</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, certain sections of *Insel* exhibit a similar paranoia to (Loy’s chapter) ‘Hurry’. In both ‘Hurry’ and *Insel*, Loy is driven to panic by the disorder of her manuscript drafts:

The contemplation of a bureau whose drawers must be emptied—the idea of some sort of classification of manuscript notes and miscellaneous papers—that in habitual jumble are easily selectable by the remembrance of their subconscious ‘arrangement,’ the effort to concentrate on something in which one takes no interest, which is the major degradation of women, gives pain so acute that, in magnifying a plausible task to an inextricable infinity of deadly detail, the mind disintegrates. The only thing to do is to rush out of the house and forget it all. So disliking to leave one’s work in favor of some practical imperative, in begrudging the time to undertake, one wastes triple the time in being averse to thinking.<sup>733</sup>

Instead of the physical state of her manuscripts depicting the decay of her own memory and her resolve to elucidate her own existence, as in ‘Hurry’, Mrs. Jones rids herself of her failed manuscript drafts by stuffing them into an kind of effigy of Insel:

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<sup>730</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 176.

<sup>731</sup> Loy, ‘Islands in the Air’, ‘Chapter IV, The Accident’, box 4, folder 61, pp. 18-22 (p. 22). A slightly longer version of this chapter can be found in ‘The Child and the Parent’, ‘Chapter IV, Arrival on the Scene of an Accident’, box 1, folder 12, pp. 18-24 (p. 24).

<sup>732</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 177.

<sup>733</sup> Loy, *Insel*, pp. 39-40.

Fortunately, after more than a week of this paralyzing resistance I came across a long painting overall. Its amplitude made something click in my brain. I at once became animated with that operative frenzy which succeeds to such periods of unproductive strain. Sewing up its neck and sleeves on the Singer, I obtained a corpse-like sack, and stuffing it full of scribbles I tied it up, and throwing it into a superfluous room, locked the door on it with a sigh of relief. I was once more myself.<sup>734</sup>

It appears that Mrs. Jones is filling Insel's body with her creation, but her fertilisation is fruitless and 'unproductive'. Is Loy animating women's supposed inability to be geniuses without mimicking male creation? Insel's character, over the course of Mrs. Jones's acquaintance with him, comes to represent the psychological impasse of her inability to produce because she is deterred by the experience of being and perception. Insel's mode of 'being', according to Mrs. Jones, is 'a sequence of disappearances', which results from his fear of 'actuality'.<sup>735</sup> Early on in the narrative, she feels that being absorbed by Insel's mediumistic state would 'vindicat[e]' her experience of Insel's 'essence':

My casual ability to partake of his moods evoked my own anxiety of the past which joining in his terror of the aerial omen made it doubly real. [...] I felt that giving in to a dislocation of my identity, which is usually perilous or demoralizing, must in this exceptional case, be finally vindicated by a revelation of what supremely lovely essence was being conveyed to be by this human wreck.<sup>736</sup>

Mrs. Jones's fascination with Insel is overtaken by her doubts about his genius when she visits his studio and is shown the 'stacks' of biographical manuscript notes that Insel had promised to show her. He presents her with 'a single sheet of paper' and hands it to her with 'great precaution'.<sup>737</sup> The lines written on this page are unreadable and take up the 'area of no more than a postage stamp'.<sup>738</sup> Insel's last word in his narrative

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<sup>734</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 40.

<sup>735</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 54.

<sup>736</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 68.

<sup>737</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 147.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid.

is 'look', which forms a 'deadlock' beyond which he cannot write.<sup>739</sup> Loy's own 'deadlock gait' in 'Hurry' is similarly a moment of inaction caused by the conscious experience of perception.<sup>740</sup> Soon after Insel shows Mrs. Jones his 'manuscript', she begins to break away from him. After this point in the narrative, Mrs. Jones flees Insel's influence, gradually having realised that under his spell she is disintegrating and coming to resemble his death-like state. Insel's generative nature and his original appearance as an artist genius dissipate once Mrs. Jones discredits his artistic abilities and realises her own. Without the translatability of 'lived states' of genius into art, Insel's initial 'Strahlen' become useless.

In Chapter One, I discussed Loy's essay 'Gertrude Stein' (1929) and its claims about the 'modern' artist. According to her essay, the modern's desire is to trace 'intellection back to the embryo':

Perhaps the idea enigma that the modern would desire to solve is, "what would we know about anything, if we didn't know anything about it?"<sup>741</sup>

Loy's anxiety in 'Hurry' emanates from doubts about her own suitability as a prophet for a (even more modern) generation 'cut to the contour of an electric spirit'.<sup>742</sup> In 'Goy Israels', Goy and her younger sister struggle to fulfil their father's prophecy of racial genius:

In the misty gas-lit evenings, returned from the intensive city bethinking himself of his heritage he interrupts the governess reading *Pilgrim's Progress*, and exhorts his children to the racial effort to achieve it's [sic] genius. Genius - - there is the way out, there is the way in, says Mr. Israels commanding a more profitable literature: the lives of painters who were poor little boys; of musicians who were poor little jews. Genius! A virus to be injected at will! Yet Faith being the substance of things hoped for even so it is. Goy's little sister is a genius. Her long fawn curls fall over the fingers of a musical prodigy.

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<sup>739</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 148.

<sup>740</sup> Loy, 'Islands in the Air', 'Hurry', box 4, folder 58, p. 1 of typescript.

<sup>741</sup> Loy, 'Gertrude Stein', *LLB82*, p. 297.

<sup>742</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', p. 6 of typescript.

And being a girl the food on which genius fattens she must reconnoitre in this very brick-box to the accompaniment [sic] of Mrs. Israels.<sup>743</sup>

Loy's invocation of the religious allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, recasts Bunyan's weary Christian as the Jewish Mr. Israels who returns from the 'intensive city', 'Goy's' own City of Destruction. However, Israels interrupts his children's religious education and demands that they read 'more profitable literature': lives of the poor who have risen to artistic and, perhaps more importantly, financial success. Genius is the 'way out' of poverty and, presumably, the 'way in[to]' the fame and respectability of those whose lives are singled out to be emulated, like the 'poor little boys' and 'jews'. Genius is also a 'virus', a disease with which the Israels' children are being purposely infected. This mix of 'racial genius' with heredity and infection suggests that Mr. Israels' exhortation is a contagion with which he burdens his children—girls who are 'the food on which genius fattens' and therefore unable to be geniuses themselves. Mrs. Israels, the pious Christian, somehow impedes her daughters' racial destinies. Loy writes elsewhere in 'Goy' that 'the purely mental heroism of the Jew has been of alien import to all other national invincibilities. It consists of his will to live'.<sup>744</sup> This alone does not guarantee the Jew a right to genius. Loy suggests that it is not, as Mr. Israels believes, a birthright. Instead, the 'exceptions' of all races are 'indrawn to the cosmopolitan circus of Genius'.<sup>745</sup>

In a section of Loy's autobiographical manuscripts she called 'Being Alive', she writes about the responsibility of the artist towards society:

An exceptional gardener will succeed in advancing, ever so slightly, the fence that hems his garden in, to enclose a hitherto unfound flower, and discovering it to his fellows he gives them some seed. This is the act of genius.<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>743</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', 'Unidentified Fragments', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 30, unnumbered page.

<sup>744</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folders 27-29, p. 104 of typescript.

<sup>745</sup> Loy, 'Goy Israels', p. 41 of typescript. Interestingly, Loy wrote the word 'circus' over her original typed word 'exhibition'.

<sup>746</sup> Loy, 'Being Alive', YCAL MSS 6, box 1, folder 20, p. 5 of typescript.

In an introductory section to *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (1982), Conover cites a 1930s letter in which Loy writes of her ongoing autobiographical project, ‘I must finish my novel—it is very sad but if I don’t finish it I shall be finished myself—how difficult all these years writing alone’.<sup>747</sup> Loy’s autobiographies attempt to explain the genesis of the modern writer and genius; by engaging with the past, she expands her definition of modernity. Loy self-consciously wrote her autobiographical novels for a specific audience: the future generations that could benefit from her message. Although Loy does not openly name herself as a ‘genius’ in her autobiographical writings, her poetry about genius admits her into the pantheon of her fellow writer geniuses. According to Burke, Loy observed to her daughter that ‘there are only two kinds of people in society, geniuses and women’.<sup>748</sup> Burke’s interpretation of this quotation implies that Loy’s distinction separates those who are obligated to follow society’s rules (women) from those who are exempt (geniuses).<sup>749</sup> However, Loy might also be commenting on the masculine premise of ‘genius’ and the presumption that it excludes women. It is also reminiscent of Cesare Lombroso’s epigraph to *The Man of Genius* (1863), which quotes the French critic Edouard de Goncourt: ‘there are no women of genius; the women of genius are men’.<sup>750</sup>

Loy’s statement, possibly inspired by Goncourt’s statement, is spoken also by Diana, one of the characters in Loy’s play *The Pamperers*. It seems likely that the play—a satirical portrait of wealthy patron-led circles and their zest for artistic fashions—was inspired by Loy’s involvement in Mabel Dodge’s Florence salon.<sup>751</sup> Diana, Dodge’s character, has the ‘most perfect yawn in Europe’ and ‘collects

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<sup>747</sup> A letter from Mina Loy, cited by Roger L. Conover in ‘Time-Table’, *LLB*82, p. ixv. Conover does not give a source for this quotation nor does he indicate the letter’s recipient.

<sup>748</sup> Burke, p. 316.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> Epigraph to *The Man of Genius* by Cesare Lombroso, cited in Battersby, p. 4. Interestingly, the 1891 reprint of Lombroso’s book, which was brought out as part of a series edited by Havelock Ellis, does not bear this epigraph.

<sup>751</sup> Burke, pp. 222-224.

geniuses'.<sup>752</sup> She is presented with a dishevelled prospective genius, whose qualifications include 'having a predatory eye' and 'picking up cigar ends' like a scavenging mud lark.<sup>753</sup> Diana accepts the genius figure and, as a 'Woman', she claims: 'I am that reciprocal quality you searched for among the moonlit mysteries of Battersea Bridge'.<sup>754</sup> Woman is the genius's inspiration and Diana's only access to the vanguard aesthetics she craves. Like Mrs. Jones in *Insel*, Diana forces the genius ('Loony') to wash in an attempt to make him more respectable. She then sets about instructing him how to behave. It is as though his physical cleansing allows Diana to create him in her own vision of a genius. Her control over Loony is her substitute for the possession of her own genius. Conversely, Loony needs Diana in order to be fixed into the role. Their reciprocal needs, as muse, artist, genius, and patron are symptomatic of the very bourgeois, quasi-marital structures that the vanguard artist claims to abhor. Diana attends on Loony in return for his association.<sup>755</sup> Loy's genius is not independent; his behaviour is a commodity, not the art he produces. In *Insel*, Mrs. Jones's patronage extends to an intellectual relationship with Insel, which he misinterprets as romantic. Increasingly, he encroaches on her independence:

Insel sat bolt upright in his couch and let out a thin screech like a mad cat; looking exactly as if he had caught a mouse he had watched for a long time.

'No.' He wagged his poor bald head judiciously, 'It cannot be—I can only love forever.'

I gave one gasp—then as always when taken unawares, my mother reproved me from my subconscious—a sophisticated middle-aged woman making immodest impressions on an innocent Schlosser's son.

'You misunderstand. I had thought of you as a "Will-o'-the-Wisp".'

Insel took no heed, he was practically licking his chops.

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<sup>752</sup> Loy, *The Pamperers*, in *Performing Arts Journal* 52, 18.1 (1996), pp. 9-17 (p. 11). Reprinted from *The Dial* 69.1 (July 1920), pp. 65-78.

<sup>753</sup> Loy, *The Pamperers*, p. 10.

<sup>754</sup> Loy, *The Pamperers*, p. 12.

<sup>755</sup> Certainly, 'Loy' and 'Loony' are homophones. Possibly Loy identifies with Loony's position as an outsider who is expected to perform acts of genius. A biographical reading of *The Pamperers* might suggest that Loy was commenting on her involvement in Dodge's literary circle.

Quite as if it were an impulse habitual to me, I decided to slug him.<sup>756</sup>

In an early handwritten manuscript draft of this page, Loy has written ‘I decided to kill him’ instead of the final version above.<sup>757</sup> Loy’s decision to change ‘kill’ to ‘slug’ and her description of the subconscious maternal censor are intriguing. Clearly, Mrs. Jones’s entanglement with Insel is a threat to her creative abilities, her mental freedom and perhaps her own potential as a genius. As an artist, her midwifery is unlike that of Diana, who is not a ‘genius’ but a ‘woman’. Any suggestion of a romance between Insel and Mrs. Jones relegates her to the ‘woman’ non-genius role set out by her own binary definition of all ‘people’.<sup>758</sup>

*The Pamperers* appeared in *The Dial* in July 1920. It was selected by Thayer to ‘initiate the magazine’s “Modern Forms” section’.<sup>759</sup> According to his letter to Pound, Thayer had rejected three of his ‘cantos’ on the grounds that his verse was ‘of an unconventional quality’.<sup>760</sup> He hoped that Pound might resubmit the poems for the newly created ‘Modern Forms’ section, which was to ‘occupy the middle of the magazine; in other words, the most dignified position’.<sup>761</sup> Thayer’s apology does not seem to have yielded the desired result—he published Loy’s play instead—but Pound did publish five pages of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* in the ‘Modern Forms’ section of the September issue.<sup>762</sup> ‘Modern Forms’ intended to expose less traditional forms of art to *The Dial*’s audiences, but the July issues’ more ‘conventional’ contributions included poems from Joyce, Arthur Rimbaud, Kenneth Burke, and Kahlil Gibran. It is difficult to

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<sup>756</sup> Loy, *Insel*, p. 118.

<sup>757</sup> Loy, ‘Insel, First Draft’, YCAL MSS 6, box 3, folder 35, p. 165 of typescript.

<sup>758</sup> In box 3, folder 37, ‘Insel, First Draft Fragments’, a note in Loy’s handwriting refers to Insel as ‘Alceste’, a character from Molière’s play, *Le Misanthrope*. Alceste is the lover of the widow Célimène. An analysis of the two texts would perhaps illuminate the dangers of the quasi-romantic relationship between Insel and Mrs. Jones.

<sup>759</sup> Burke, p. 302.

<sup>760</sup> Letter from Scofield Thayer to Ezra Pound, 21 May 1920, in *DL*, pp. 29-31 (p. 31).

<sup>761</sup> Ibid. A letter from Pound to Thayer, 7 June 1920, in *DL*, p. 39, indicates that Pound sent ‘H.S. Mauberley’ to Thayer via his father, ‘H.L. Pound’.

<sup>762</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘H.S. Mauberley’, *The Dial* 69.3 (September 1920), 283-287.



imagine why Loy's play would be considered more modern than the other works included in the same issue. From Thayer's letter it appears that the title 'Modern Forms' might have been intended as a caution to the reader. By separating the 'modern' writing from the rest of the magazine, he suggests that either the subject matter or the form of Loy's play might have caused offence. *The Pamperers* is fairly formal in terms of dialogue, staging and narrative progression. It seems likely that Thayer was uncomfortable with the play's obvious attack on the pretensions of 'genius' and on the gullibility of wealthy patrons. Under the title 'modern', Loy's satire unwittingly points to the little magazine's commodification of genius for public consumption, and to the vital relationship between those who promote genius and those who claim to possess it.

## Conclusion

Out of millions of people there is always enough intellect to keep a masterpiece afloat—on the ocean of recognition—for a considerable length of time.<sup>763</sup>

An argument in favour of publishing Mina Loy's autobiographical manuscripts has yet to be made. Over fifteen years ago, Loy's only published novel, *Insel*, was brought out by (the now defunct) Black Sparrow Press.<sup>764</sup> Arguably, *Insel* was 'finished' or near-finished, and the published version of her novel is based on a typescript 'prepared and corrected' by Loy herself.<sup>765</sup> It does seem that, at various stages, Loy's 'revisions' were written into or out of a larger manuscript: 'Islands in the Air'. *Insel* appears to have once belonged to 'Islands'.<sup>766</sup> Marisa Januzzi's study of Loy's poem manuscripts claims that James Laughlin, editor of New Directions Press, refused to publish *Insel* in 1953, but that in 1960 he suggested that the press might be interested in publishing the presumably longer manuscript, 'Islands in the Air'. In a letter to Loy, he wrote that some of her 'insights, phrases and images' in 'Islands in the Air' were 'absolutely remarkable'.<sup>767</sup> Januzzi also cites a letter from Laughlin to another publisher, Simon and Schuster, which expressed the hope that they might be able to edit and bring out 'Islands in the Air', or at least the *Insel* section. Although Laughlin felt that 'Islands in the Air' was 'extremely fascinating' and had 'great possibilities', he was

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<sup>763</sup> Loy, YCAL box 7, folder, 188, undated page. This note appears to be part of plans for an unpublished and undated essay titled 'The Misunderstand of Picasso'.

<sup>764</sup> Black Sparrow Press began publishing books in 1966 (coincidentally the year of Loy's death) and stopped bringing out new titles in 2002. The publisher David R. Godine is continuing to bring out selected editions of Black Sparrow publications. However, email conversations with Godine confirmed that Loy's *Insel* was not selected for reissue and is now out of print.

<sup>765</sup> Roger L. Conover, 'Editor's Note', *Insel*, ed. by Elizabeth Arnold (Santa Rosa, CA.: Black Sparrow Press, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>766</sup> On pages in the *Insel* manuscript (YCAL, box 3, folders 31-57), Loy has handwritten or typed 'Islands in the Air'. Her titling is inconsistent and erratic. It is unclear if *Insel*'s inclusion into 'Islands' was an afterthought or if these manuscripts were always meant to be part of a larger 'Islands' book.

<sup>767</sup> Letter from James Laughlin to Mina Loy, 8 March 1960, quoted in Marissa Januzzi, "'Reconstru[ing] Scar[s]": Mina Loy and the Matter of Modernist Poetics' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1997), pp. 123-125 (p.124). (Hereafter cited as 'RS').

unsure if one ‘could exactly call it a novel’.<sup>768</sup> Ultimately, the entire ‘Islands in the Air’ manuscript (including *Insel*) was returned to Loy’s daughter (who had been overseeing the publication attempt) in 1963.<sup>769</sup> It seems plausible that this larger manuscript of ‘Islands’ also included drafts of ‘Goy Israels’, ‘Colossus’, and the reworked version of ‘The Child and the Parent’, which Loy also titled ‘Islands in the Air’ (hereafter referred to as ‘Child’ and ‘Islands’). It is unlikely that both ‘Child’ and its revision, ‘Islands’, could have inhabited the same final book manuscript that was presented to Laughlin, because the narratives are too similar. Some parts of ‘Islands’ reproduce exact passages from ‘Child’. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, the second half of ‘Child’, the ‘Parent’ section, was most likely eliminated from the version submitted for publication; I cannot imagine a place for it in the ‘Islands’ manuscript.

In 1998, Januzzi argued for ‘renewed archival research’ in her bibliography of Loy studies, claiming that ‘it is impossible to understand Loy’s literary motives without at least an acquaintance with the extent and scope of her unpublished papers’.<sup>770</sup> She suggests, rightly, that no real debate about Loy’s literary career can be had without a knowledge and awareness of the publishing ‘gap’ that her archived manuscripts fill. In the preceding chapters, I have pointed out some areas where the archive should be corrected or, in some cases, where manuscripts should be reordered. I have exposed elements of the archive that contribute to a growing sense of the ‘progression’ of Loy’s writing, such as the ‘Goy’ draft that was sent to Julien Levy in 1932.<sup>771</sup> The overuse of labels like ‘unfinished’ or ‘failure’ with respect to Loy’s manuscripts is a concern. Such

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<sup>768</sup> Letter from James Laughlin to Elizabeth Sutherland of Simon and Schuster, 26 September 1961, quoted in Januzzi, ‘RS’, pp. 124-125. Januzzi’s study is an excellent resource for Loy scholars; its attention to detail highlights and corrects many of the regrettable shortcomings of the 1982 edition of Loy’s poetry: *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (Highlands, N.C.: Jargon Society, 1982).

<sup>769</sup> Januzzi, ‘RS’, p. 125.

<sup>770</sup> Marisa Januzzi, ‘Preface’ to her bibliography of Loy’s writings and some Loy criticism, in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. by Maera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, ME.: National Poetry Foundation, 1998), pp. 507-514 (p. 508).

<sup>771</sup> Referred to as ‘Goy 32’ in Chapter 4.

readings diagnose Loy's possibly incomplete drafts as pathological—in Loy's words, 'intermittent...unfinishing'.<sup>772</sup> Loy's idea of the 'unfinishing' text is not the same as that of an 'unfinished' work. 'Unfinishing' implies that incompleteness is an intentional textual strategy.

This study has, throughout, tried to avoid such distinctions. Instead, it is useful to imagine that Loy's foregrounding of her 'failure' to 'finish' is part of her overall autobiographical project, and that it is consistent with the innovations of her modern verse experiments. Why is it that readers of Loy's autobiographies have been willing to admit her poetry to a 'tradition' of the avant-garde, and yet they read her prose as a more or less factual telling of her childhood? There appears to be a resistance to the idea that her autobiographical prose, too, reacts to modernising shifts within the autobiographical genre. Further studies of Loy's prose would benefit from comparisons with Djuna Barnes's autobiographical work, *Ryder*, which was published during Loy's and Barnes's cohabitation in Paris and at the same time as Loy was drafting her own autobiographical prose.<sup>773</sup> Certainly, Loy's essay on Gertrude Stein and her poem about James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in addition to her interest in scientific and spiritual modes of autobiography, call for specialised readings of the manuscripts, ones that respond to her interests at the time of writing.

The importance of Loy's existing literary contribution (as a poet) can be gauged, in one way, by her lasting effect on poets writing today. Notably, Drew Milne's collection of 30 anonymously published poems, *Pig Cupid: A Homage to Mina Loy* (2000), was culled from poets all over the world who wrote in response to Loy's poem series 'Love Songs'.<sup>774</sup> As one would expect, there are echoes of Loy's poem

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<sup>772</sup> Loy, 'Hurry', from 'Islands in the Air', YCAL MSS 6, box 4, folder 58, p. 3 of typescript.

<sup>773</sup> Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 368. Burke also mentions that Loy read parts of Barnes' *Nightwood* manuscript between 1928-1929.

<sup>774</sup> Loy, 'Songs to Joannes', *LLB96*, pp. 53-68. 'Love Songs' and 'Songs to Joannes' are titles that Loy used interchangeably for different versions of this poem published between 1915-1923.

throughout: ‘wandering incendiaries’ (from ‘19<sup>th</sup> C’); ‘Sift in the praisable’ (from ‘poppycock:’; and ‘pouting optic fibrous’ (from ‘The Aspirant Inhabits Javel and I have a Spiral-shaped Penis’), to name but a few, react to Loy’s style and poetic diction.<sup>775</sup> These tributes attempt to shock, much in the same way that Loy’s ‘Songs’ shocked her readers less than a hundred years previously.<sup>776</sup> Poets, contributing anonymously, are given license to invent an erotic alter ego within the confines of Milne’s tribute. One reviewer aptly summarised *Pig Cupid*’s homage to Loy as ‘the anonymous chat of [Milne’s] masked guests’.<sup>777</sup> The cult, subversive connotation of ‘masked’ emerges directly from images of a proprietary ‘tug-of-war’ between factions of poets and factions of critics (although many of these anonymous contributors could fall into both categories, as does Milne). In a letter written to Stein in 1917, Mabel Dodge exclaimed: ‘Ducie Haweis [Loy’s nickname during her first marriage and residence in Florence] flashed up over here—but got in almost at once with all the wrong kind of people—I mean the kind one tries & passes up finally!’<sup>778</sup> Presumably, Dodge was updating Stein on Loy’s recent arrival in New York and her subsequent reception into the literary circles of which Dodge did not approve. While Dodge’s comment points to a possible rivalry between the two women, it more importantly signals the relevance of literary factions similar to those represented by Milne’s ‘masked guests’. Though unnamed, his ‘guests’ contribute by invitation only, and membership guarantees vital connections for modernist and contemporary artist circles alike.<sup>779</sup>

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<sup>775</sup> Anon., *Pig Cupid: An Homage to Mina Loy*, ed. by Drew Milne (Cambridge: Parataxis Editions, 2000), p. 20 (‘19<sup>th</sup> C’), p. 15 (‘poppycock:’), and p. 6 (‘The Aspirant Inhabits Javel and I Have A Spiral-shaped Penis’).

<sup>776</sup> Burke, pp. 6-7.

<sup>777</sup> Andrew Jordan, ‘A Being Rooted in Being’, *10<sup>th</sup> Muse*, 12 (2002) <http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk> [accessed 17 September 2007] (paragraph 10 of 29)

<sup>778</sup> Letter from Mabel Dodge to Gertrude Stein, 14 January 1917, in *A History of Having a Great Many Times Not Continued to Be Friends: The Correspondence Between Mabel Dodge and Gertrude Stein, (1911-1934)*, ed. by Patricia R. Everett (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), p. 244.

<sup>779</sup> Recently, the poet and songwriter Billy Corgan composed ‘Mina Loy, M.O.H.’ for his solo debut album. ‘M.O.H.’ is an acronym for ‘my old heart’, the original working title of the song and one of the song’s refrains. The song’s apocalyptic visions appear to have nothing to do with Loy’s writing. It seems likely that her name is appended here as a kind of avant-garde ‘calling-card’. It would appear that Loy’s

As this study is being finished, the first critical companion to Loy's writing from an English publisher is being compiled and is due out next year.<sup>780</sup> Although her work fits into a paradigm of international modernist writing, her British childhood and its possible influence on her writing is a dimension that should be further illuminated, particularly in reference to her autobiographies. While one would hope that any expansion in the availability of Loy's work might lead to a complementary widening of critical approaches to Loy, the introduction of previously unpublished material constitutes yet another 'rediscovery' in a lengthy, well-documented revival of her reputation. Certainly, the terms 'rediscovery' and 'discovery' have different implications. The revival process requires that the discovery of previously unpublished material leads to a rediscovery of Loy's once prominent literary status. Samuel French Morse's article, 'The Rediscovery of Mina Loy and the Avant Garde' (1961), points to various monumentalising anthologies, such as Alfred Kreymborg's *Lyric America: An Anthology of American Poetry (1630-1930)* (1930), which he credits as having 'kept alive the name of Mina Loy'.<sup>781</sup> Each time a reader discovers Loy's name and work in the anthology, she is being in a sense 'rediscovered' by a new audience.

Yet, how might Loy's autobiographies be made available without the associated critical burden of 'neglect' and 'failure' that often accompanies previously unseen material? Critical anthologies that include 'forgotten' works, such as the recent *Gender in Modernism* (2007)—a sequel to Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism* published in 1990—are excellent scholarly resources that not only bring certain writers back into print, but also invigorate ongoing debates about the historical, stylistic and gender-inflected boundaries of modernism. *Gender in Modernism's* inclusion of the

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mythic stature as a prophetic (and 'neglected') modern is being invoked by Corgan to add legitimacy and literary value to the song. This is, in itself, an interesting, if not somewhat disturbing, development in the iconicity of Loy's posthumous reputation.

<sup>780</sup> *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, ed. by Rachel Potter and S Hobson, is forthcoming from Salt Press in Spring 2008. Sections from Chapter 3 of this study will appear in the companion.

<sup>781</sup> Samuel French Morse, 'The Rediscovery of Mina Loy and the Avant Garde', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 2.2 (Spring-Summer 1961), 12-19 (p. 12).

poet and novelist Hope Mirrlees's psycho-geographical walk-poem 'Paris' (1919), accompanied by Julia Briggs' introduction to Mirrlees's life and work, will undoubtedly contribute to discussions about women's objectification (as the sexually available body of the city or the prostitute) within narratives of the early twentieth-century flâneur.<sup>782</sup> Yet, Kime Scott's anthologies, brought out in expensive editions by academic presses, have a very specific audience: scholars of modernism or of the early twentieth century. It is also disconcerting that although they contain works by 'canonical' figures like Pound and Eliot, these and other anthologies of marginalised female writers shore up the gender boundaries of the canon they mean to revise. This appears to be a by-product of academic historicising; it is also possibly a necessary function of 'rediscovery'. Perhaps, as Aaron Jaffe contends, the 'key ingredient of modernist reputation is not merely the demonstration of high literary labour through extant literary texts, but the capacity to frame this work in reference to the contrastingly lesser work of certain contemporaries'.<sup>783</sup> He argues that 'all canonical figures have both solid bodies of authoritative texts' and that the role of 'self-promotion' and collaboration in establishing canonical status cannot be underestimated.<sup>784</sup>

Interestingly, both of Kime Scott's anthologies have included previously published works by Loy. These texts are inserted into a particular historical or ideological frame, in Loy's case feminism, Futurism and, of course, modernism.<sup>785</sup> Who would be the audience for Loy's autobiographical writings, should they be published?

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<sup>782</sup> Hope Mirrlees, 'Paris: A Poem', ed. by Julia Briggs, in *Gender in Modernism*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scot (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), pp. 270-287. Reprinted from *Paris: A Poem* (Richmond: Hogarth Press, 1920). *Paris: A Poem* is forthcoming in *The Wolf* poetry magazine (London). *The Wolf* will also publish Mirrlees's poem on the magazine's website. Online publication will make her poem available worldwide.

<sup>783</sup> Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 101.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

<sup>785</sup> See Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' (1914) in *Gender in Modernism* (2007), pp. 91-93. Also, *The Gender of Modernism* (1990) includes a chapter edited and introduced by Carolyn Burke, (pp. 230-251), which reprints Loy's essay 'Gertrude Stein', 'Aphorisms on Futurism', 'Joyce's Ulysses', 'Brancusi's Golden Bird'. Burke's chapter also includes Ezra Pound's edited (and retitled) version of Loy's poem 'The Ineffectual Marriage', reprinted from *Instigations* (1920).

Would it be a general readership familiar with her poetry or scholars? In other words, would the ‘difficulty’ that many associate with Loy’s poetry also be equally deterring for readers of her prose? There cannot be any doubt that her autobiographies are a valuable resource for Loy scholars, but if we believe the voice of Loy’s chapter ‘Hurry’, can we make her work accessible (both available materially and edited into a readable format) to a wider audience, as she suggests was her wish?<sup>786</sup> Ultimately, these questions will have to be answered by anyone who undertakes the task of editing Loy’s unpublished prose, and, in turn, be scrutinised by her readers and critics.

Further studies might also look more closely at possible correlations between Loy’s autobiographical prose and the art of the American sculptor Joseph Cornell. She recommended Alain-Fournier’s *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1912) and Mary Webb’s *Precious Bane* (1924) to him and the influence of these books on both Loy’s and Cornell’s art would be a fascinating course of inquiry.<sup>787</sup> One can draw lines of connection immediately between Loy’s autobiographies, Alain-Fournier’s idealisations of the child’s consciousness and Webb’s scrutiny of hereditary disease and social exclusion.

Readings of her autobiographical prose complicate the prevalent critical image of Loy as a representative ‘modern woman’ and broaden its definition by virtue of the time-period from which her writings originate. Scholars have examined the later stages of Loy’s writing career, between the late 1920s and her death in 1966, and analysed her poetry about New York vagrants and the death of her second husband, Arthur Cravan. Until now, no critical approach has examined Loy’s transition from writing poetry to prose, and no substantial criticism compares the different versions of her autobiographies. The entire Loy archive itself stands to represent her waning interest in the movements of the early twentieth century; her autobiographies and notes suggest that Loy was as much rejecting these successive aesthetic ideals as she was

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<sup>786</sup> See Chapter 3 for my analysis of Loy’s chapter ‘Hurry’ from ‘Islands in the Air’.

<sup>787</sup> Burke, pp. 405-408.



reformulating them. In that way, her archive is a fascinating record of her exposure to early twentieth-century developments in literary style and genre, as well as to advances in psychology, science and wartime politics. Moreover, Loy's autobiographies portray the inability of the modern writer to exclude the past. As an ongoing project, her autobiographies embody the 'make it new' anxiety of her generation and they expand on the idea of 'modernity' through their seemingly contradictory obsessions with newness and with memory. According to Loy's notes for her essay 'The Misunderstand of Picasso': Dada's 'interjections of human thought', and Joyce's and Freud's 'cinematological plumbing and resuming' respond to 'the scattered ejecta of an exploding psychology', which Loy calls 'the Shatter Era'.<sup>788</sup> It is the responsibility of the artist to lead mankind in the reformulation of this new 'era' and its associated multiplicities of self and consciousness. She concludes:

The human mind has got to assemble for itself out of the infinite variation—a new fundamental—it must begin again with the simple relation of savage apprehension of the macrocosmic presence—modified in some divinely decreed manner by its lengthy civilized apprenticeship—this matter era must be the sheath of the eclosion of practicable unity—<sup>789</sup>

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<sup>788</sup> Loy, YCAL MSS 6, box 7, folder 188, undated handwritten page from 'The Misunderstand of Picasso'.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

## **Appendix**

### **A Chronology of Mina Loy's Autobiographies**

Mina Loy's archived autobiographical manuscripts are especially challenging to order chronologically. It appears that she continuously revised as she wrote; many, if not all, of her drafts bear some form of 'correction'. These corrections are rarely changes to grammar, syntax or spelling. Usually, Loy's notations indicate major changes, like the assumption of a large portion (elsewhere) into her draft. For example, Loy often circled or crossed out entire page sections of her drafts; usually she would indicate (by hand) whether or not she had reused pieces of earlier drafts in later versions. She also was in the habit of assigning titles to fragments of notes or partial drafts. The title 'Goy Israels' or 'Islands' (an abbreviation she used for 'Islands in the Air') often appears in the margin or at the top of a page. Loy seems to indicate where fragments or pages 'belong' as if it were an afterthought. Unfortunately, because her papers have been reordered by the archivists at the Beinecke Library, it is often difficult to follow the order that she might have had in mind.

That said, 'Islands in the Air', 'The Child and the Parent' and 'Goy Israels' all have lengthy typescript versions, each of which is several pages long. The most complete and 'finalised' draft of 'Islands in the Air' has 156 typewritten pages and is divided into 10 chapters. 'Goy Israels' has pages numbered discontinuously up to '146', but several of these pages are missing. 'The Child and the Parent' has 69 continuous pages and 10 chapters. Another chapter, entitled 'The Outraged Womb', is numbered 11 and appears to have been part of 'The Child and the Parent' and, later, 'Islands'. Although Loy has labelled Chapter 11 'Islands', I suspect that it was originally part of the 'The Child and the Parent' typescript because Chapter 11 is not continuous with the

narrative of 'Islands'. 'Islands' concludes with a description of Loy's adolescence and her year at art school in Munich. 'The Outraged Womb' is an examination of women's sexual and reproductive lives in a post-Freud era. This chapter mentions no elements of Loy's personal history. It is therefore more likely that 'The Outraged Womb' belongs to 'The Child and the Parent', which also contains writings about women's sexuality and married lives. I have included a table that compares the chapter outlines of both 'The Child and the Parent' and 'Islands' (see below).

The following outline has been developed through an analysis of several datable elements, including watermarked pages. Watermarks are problematic; they provide us with a rough estimate of which continent (Europe or North America) Loy might have been writing in at the time of composition. As I stated previously, Loy's paper usage does not seem strategic; she appears to have written on whatever was at hand at the time, including address books, cablegrams, tracing paper, notebooks, typewriter paper, and invoice slips and letterhead from her Paris lampshade shop on the rue du Colisée. I am working under the assumption that Loy would not have transported massive quantities of paper across the Atlantic during her travels between Europe and the United States. This seems an expensive and cumbersome practice. However, this does not discredit the possibility entirely, and such an assumption does not guarantee that Loy did not make changes to earlier watermarked drafts whilst in another country. At times, the paper in Loy's archive appears to contain markings from many years on it. Loy used a variety of writing implements, including ink fountain pen, ballpoint pen, pencil and (what appears to be) red crayon. Judging from those manuscripts that Loy gave fixed dates, such as drafts of poems, she used ink less frequently in later years and opted instead for ballpoint pen (or biro) and pencil. Often it is possible to date Loy's autobiographical manuscripts by what might be on the verso. Datable poems occasionally appear on pages or notes for her manuscript drafts. All of these dates are

rough estimates; they take into consideration existing biographical information about where Loy lived and wrote from Carolyn Burke's biography and Loy's correspondence.

Finally, it is worth saying something about the process of dating watermarks. Few databases of twentieth-century watermarks exist. Correspondence and archival research with the British Paper Association, the Deutsche Bücherei in Leipzig, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Djuna Barnes archive at the University of Maryland, the Ezra Pound papers at the McPherson library (University of Victoria), the ArjoWiggins paper company, the EVTEK Institute of art and design (Finland), private collectors and book sellers with online databases inform many of my estimates about the dates and origins of these watermarks. Not all of my inquiries yielded useful clues. For instance, I had hoped to find watermarked pages in Djuna Barnes's or Natalie Barney's archive similar to those used by Loy. Barnes, Barney and Loy were all resident and writing in Paris during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Barnes and Loy lived in the same apartment building on the rue St.-Romain during these years<sup>790</sup>. I have found twelve different types of line watermarks among Loy's archived prose and poem manuscripts. They are: 'Alliance Bond'; 'Conqueror Typewriting'; 'Cronicon USA'; 'Draconis': 'Eagle Parchment'; 'Insubria Mill'; 'Macadam'; 'Old Chester Bond'; 'Penwyn Writing'; 'P&H'; 'Strathmore Bay Path Vellum'; and 'Whiting's Typewriter'. The following table examines each manuscript separately.

#### 1. 'Goy Israels' (ca. 1925-1930)

Loy's writing about 'Jews' is contained in folder 189 of box 7, 'Notes on Jews'. These handwritten notes appear on Loy's shop letterhead and many of them have been titled 'Goy Israels' in Loy's hand. The 'Goy Israels' 'unidentified fragments' folder also contains a chapter outline of 'Goy' on the verso of Loy's Paris letterhead.

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<sup>790</sup> Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 368.

Additionally, handwritten fragments of Loy's poem 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose' (1923-1925) also bear the title 'Goy'. Loy's shop letterhead is datable. She owned the shop between 1926 and 1928. It would seem that Loy composed 'Goy Israels' just after or while she worked on 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose'. As I mention in Chapter 4, the two texts also share exact passages. One typescript fragment from 'Anglo-Mongrels' on 'Alliance Bond' has 'Goy' written in Loy's hand on the verso.

Another typescript poem fragment bears the handwritten title 'Goy'; it has the typed date '1921' (box 2, folder 30). This fragment precedes 'Anglo-Mongrels's composition and was possibly used to inspire its prose version 'Goy'.

On page 117 of the 'Goy' typescript, Loy has written the year '1930' over the word 'already' in the following sentence:

'Already half the World is forever off to the sea-side [.]' This sentence suggests that in 1930 or possibly just thereafter, Loy made this alteration.

2. 'Goy Israels: A Play of Consciousness' (handwritten manuscript dated by Loy, 1932)

Chapter 4 explains the differences between the content of 'Goy Israels: A Play of Consciousness' (hereafter referred to as 'Goy 32') and 'Goy Israels'. 'Goy 32' was sent to Julien Levy; it has only recently been added to the Beinecke's collection and this study is the first to examine it. This version is not on watermarked paper. It appears to be a transition piece between 'Goy Israels' and 'The Child and the Parent'.

3. 'The Child and the Parent' (ca. 1932-1936)

Chapter 3 argues that 'The Child and the Parent' (hereafter referred to as 'Child') is an earlier draft of 'Islands'. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that Loy describes salvaging the 'Child' typescript in her chapter from 'Islands', 'Hurry'. The only dateable paper sample is the chapter outline of 'Child', in box 1, folder 10. Her plan for 'Child' is handwritten on a page of Loy's shop letterhead. The rest of the typescript has no watermarked pages, except for Chapter 11, 'The Outraged Womb' which, as I have previously stated, is likely to be a part of 'Child'. This chapter has pages bearing the watermark 'Conqueror Typewriting'. I have found a sample of this type of watermark from Paris in the 1930s.<sup>791</sup> The 'Conqueror' watermark dates back to the late nineteenth-century and is currently owned by the paper manufacturer ArjoWiggins. Correspondence with the ArjoWiggins archivists has found no source for the 'Conqueror Typewriting' watermark, although they believe it is unlikely that it was manufactured by another paper mill. 'Conqueror' was produced during the twentieth-century in mills in Britain and France. I have found no examples of 'Conqueror Typewriting' paper in manuscripts that Loy was likely to have written in the United States. It seems plausible that this is a European watermark and that pages containing this watermark date from Loy's

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<sup>791</sup> Correspondence with Librarie Jean Claude Vrain. This antiquarian bookseller has an undated letter from Sachs Maurice Ettinghausen that was written in Paris during the early 1930s. The date is only an estimate. They have based it on biographical information.

residence outside of the United States. I suspect that she used Conqueror paper while she was living in Paris between 1923 and 1936.

#### 4. *Insel* (ca. 1936-1940s)

*Insel*'s plot centres on Insel (a character based on the surrealist painter Richard Oelze) and Mrs. Jones (a character based on Loy). During the narrative, Mrs. Jones is said to be writing a book. It would seem that this 'book' may be 'The Child and the Parent'. While Loy wrote 'Child' she was also making notes for Insel's story, originally titled 'Totenkopf' or 'Die Irma' (the latter is a title of one of Insel's paintings). Oelze met Loy after 1933, following his arrival in Paris.<sup>792</sup> Early 'Totenkopf' drafts are written on 'Conqueror Typewriting' paper. Another unwatermarked page from 'Totenkopf' is dated '5 Jan 37' (box 3, folder 37, 'Insel First Draft Fragments'). Most of Loy's first and second typescript draft of *Insel* is on paper bearing a 'Cronicon USA' watermark. This supports the theory that she prepared her drafts of *Insel* after she arrived in New York from Paris in 1936 using notes and handwritten drafts she had made in France.

#### 5. 'Islands in the Air' (ca. 1940s-1950s)

Handwritten drafts of 'Hurry' are on 'Cronicon USA' paper (box 4, folder 58 and 70, 'Hurry' and 'Islands Fragments'). All typescripts of 'Islands' are on paper made in the US: 'Cronicon USA' and 'Penwyn Writing'. I suspect that this version of Loy's autobiographies was written entirely in the US, while she was living in New York (1936-1953). 'Hurry' recasts 'Child' and describes the process that goes into reworking her chapters into a newer version.

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<sup>792</sup> Burke, pp. 381-382.

## **'The Child and the Parent'**

- Ch. I. The Bird Alights<sup>a</sup>
- II. The Beginning of the World<sup>b</sup>
- III. An Imitation of Death
- IV. Arrival on the Scene of an Accident<sup>c</sup>
- V. The Will
- VI. The Link with the Parent
- VII. Ladies in an Aviary
- VIII. The Hewn Tree<sup>d</sup>
- IX. The Dissatisfied Bride
- X. A Certain Percentage of Women
- XI. The Outraged Womb
- XII. Being Alive/Interlude<sup>c</sup>

## **'Islands in the Air'**

- Ch. I. Hurry<sup>f</sup>
- II. The Bird Alights
- III. The Beginning of the World
- IV. The Accident
- V. Adjustment
- VI. Disappearances
- VII. Ethics and Hygiene of Nightmare
- VIII. Untitled
- IX. Man
- X. Untitled

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<sup>a</sup> Typescript version in 'Islands' titled 'Chapter I'. Most of 'Child' written in the late 1920s. Loy letterhead paper used for outline of chapters.

<sup>b</sup> Typescript version 'Chapter II'.

<sup>c</sup> Loy's handwritten draft in MS folder on 'Cronicon USA' watermark.

<sup>d</sup> Loy's handwritten note on verso 'not for use, uncorrected' and 'Goy'. Not used for subsequent drafts of novels in 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>e</sup> On verso of page in this 'interlude' section is notes for 'Repassed Platform', a poem written in the early 1930s. Paris.

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<sup>f</sup> Chapters V and VI are altered versions of the same in both novels.

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MSS 6: Mina Loy Papers.

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